

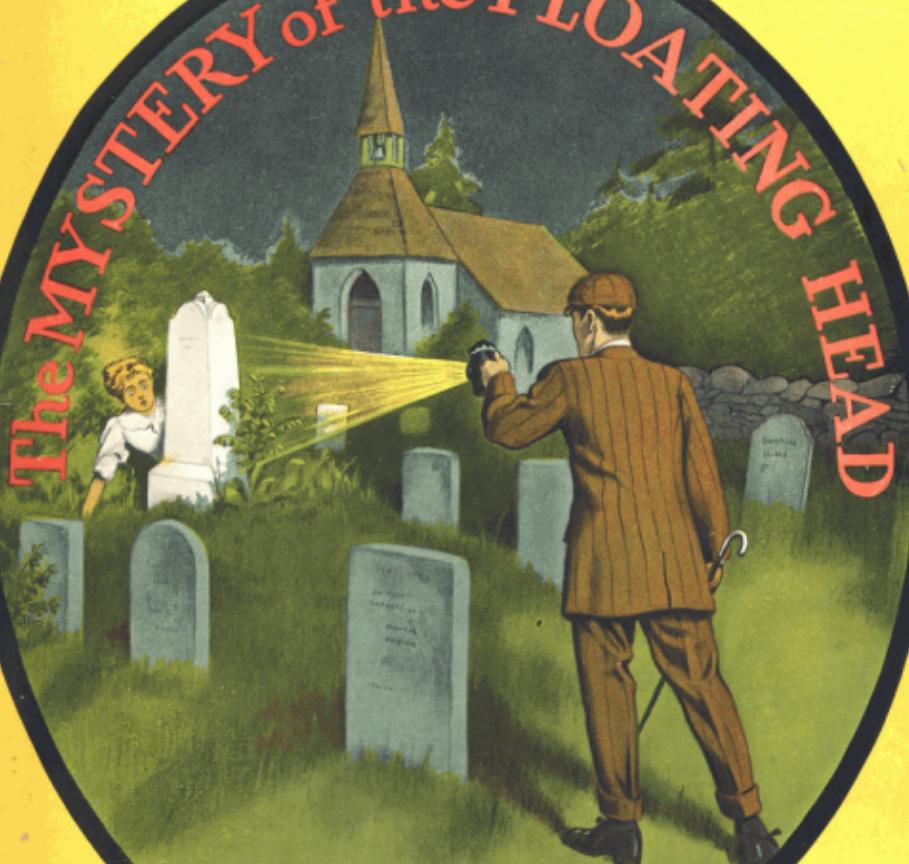


# OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 21

Price 5 cents

The MYSTERY of the FLOATING HEAD



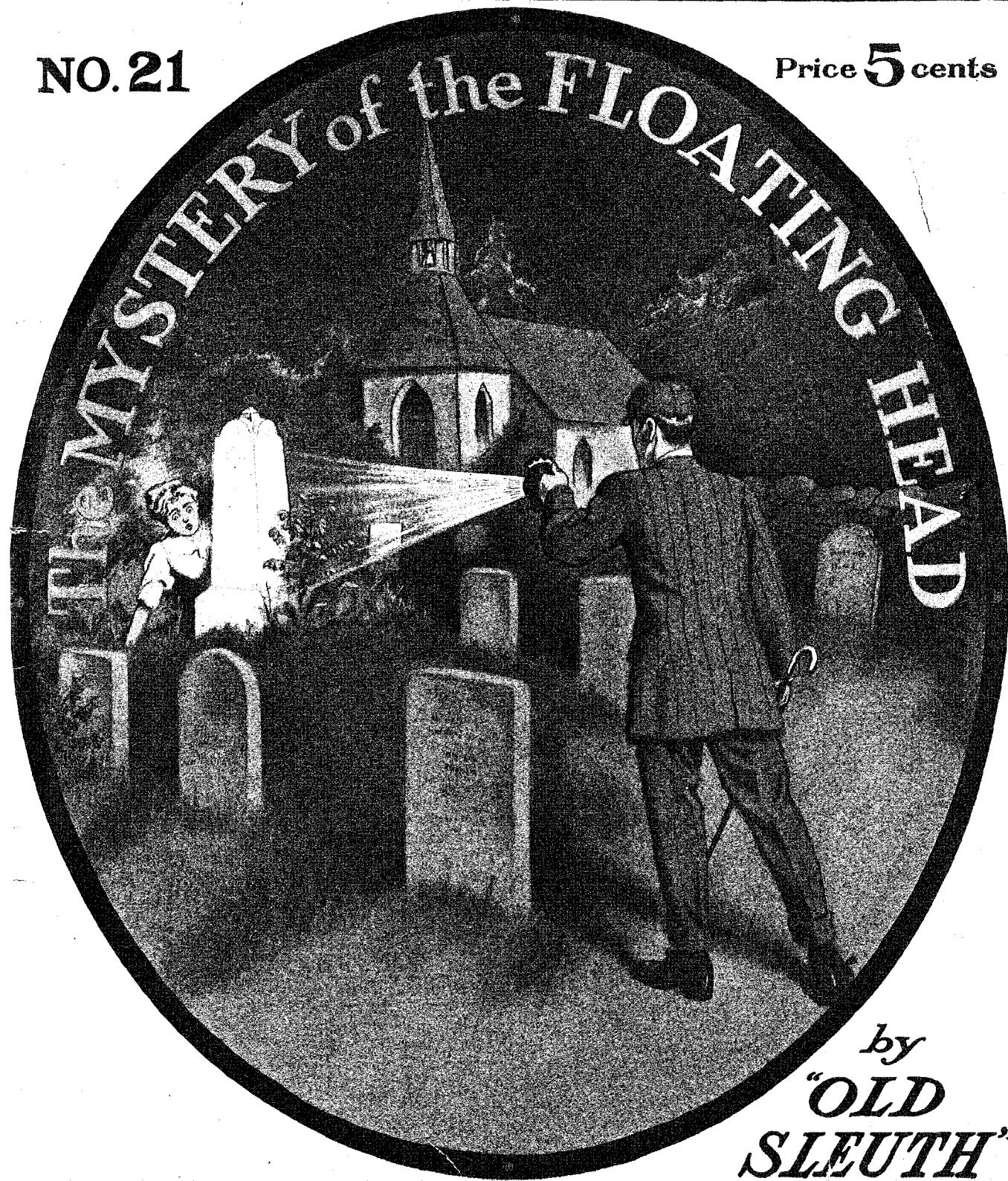
by  
"OLD  
SLEUTH"



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# OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

*A Series of*

## THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

No. 21.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

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# The Mystery of the Floating Head

OR

## Caught by the King of the Detectives

By "OLD SLEUTH."

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER AT THE TOMBS.

BRANDON, the handsome detective, strolled one morning into the Tombs Police Court.

His first glance rested upon a harrowing sight.

Sitting before the judge as a prisoner was the most lovely girl he had beheld in many years.

The prisoner was not more than eighteen; a wealth of hair rained down upon her beautifully formed shoulders, as her head was bent forward in a listening attitude.

The detective passed to a position from whence he could have a better view of her face.

His liveliest interest was aroused instantly.

The maiden was wondrously beautiful; her features were classically regular; her complexion clear and dazzling, and illuminated by eyes of purest blue.

If innocence was ever stamped upon a human face, it sat there enthroned.

Brandon was an old *habitué* of the court-room, and had seen many beautiful women arraigned on various charges, but never before had his interest been aroused as upon the occasion of which we write.

In the witness chair sat the accuser.

The latter's face, under the keen gaze of the detective, was not less remarkable than that of the accused.

Cruelty and cunning, and steadfastness of purpose, were plainly depicted as characteristics.

He was a man apparently above fifty; handsomely dressed, and outwardly bore the stamp of great respectability.

A mere glance is sufficient for a man like Brandon.

Within an instant an experienced and rapid thinker will weigh a thousand possibilities.

The detective's immediate conclusion was that he had fallen upon a single incident in a real life drama.

The old story of the fierce wolf and helpless lamb.

A few inquiries revealed the fact that the beautiful prisoner was accused of the grave crime of burglary.

She had pleaded poverty and inability to pay her "counsel."

Burt Brandon stepped over beside her, and bending upon her a kindly expression, said, in a low voice:

"I am Brandon, the detective; I know you are innocent; do not be afraid, I will protect you and see that justice is done!"

An angel from Heaven could not have brought more precious message.

The poor girl had been dragged to prison, then into the court amidst the usual crowd of heartless rounders ever to be found there.

Not a single ray of hope had dawned in her heart.

She had a fearful tale to tell, but, alas! she knew that none would believe it.

She knew well the purpose and intent of her deadly foe, her accuser; but who would believe it possible that her extraordinary disclosures were true?

Black despair ruled in her heart.

A fearful resolve only gave her strength to stand the passing ordeal.

Death, like a black pall, hung over her when a single ray of hope was aroused by the words of Brandon.

She had never seen the detective before, had never heard his name mentioned, and yet there was a magnetism in his very presence that assured her that Heaven, at the last critical moment, had sent a friend to her succor.

A flush came to her lovely cheek, and a glad light to her eyes, as she looked frankly and boldly in the face of the detective, and answered:

"I am innocent and Heaven will reward you!"

All the officials in that court knew Burt Brandon.

He was a man who in the profession had earned a reputation that made him respected by judges and feared by rogues.

In criminal affairs he was the great authority.

No ordinary case claimed his attention.

It was only when some great and extraordinary mystery was to be solved, that his counsel was sought, and then never in vain.

His performances had won for him the sobriquet, "King of the Detectives," and he had well earned the title.

None envied him his honor.

He was known as a kind-hearted, generous and brave man.

Burt Brandon had earned a fortune in his profession, and it was generally understood that he would only undertake a "big case."

The examination of the accuser had but just commenced, when Brandon spoke to the accused, Renie Ruthendale.

Immediately afterward, the detective signaled to a lawyer to approach.

A whispered conversation followed, when the lawyer, addressing the court, said:

"Your honor, I have just been retained in this case, and request an adjournment; I also desire to offer bail for the accused."

The judge was only too glad to observe the different aspect of the case, and asked:

"What security can you offer?"

Burt Brandon stepped forward, and said:

"Your honor, I will go bail in any amount."

The judge conferred a moment with the assistant district attorney, who was present in the interests of the people.

An amount was agreed upon, and proper bonds prepared.

The accuser would have protested, but his counsel knew that a protest, under the circumstances, would prove futile, and restrained him.

Bayard Knight looked like a man who had suddenly heard some dreadful news, when he saw the turn affairs had taken.

"Who is that man?" he inquired in a whisper of his attorney, pointing toward Brandon.

"Brandon, the great detective!"

Bayard Knight had heard of this wonderful man, and inwardly trembled; but, for the time being, he was helpless, and, after hearing when the case would be called up, g.s., left the court-room with his counsel. Once outside he said:

"What is the meaning of what has occurred?"

"The girl's beauty has touched Brandon; she has found a friend who will stick to her through thick and thin; you will have to make a case dead against her to convict, with that man at her back."

Bayard Knight's face assumed a sickly look as he answered:

"Curse that man! He shall not get her free. I'll spend a fortune first!"

The counsel fixed an inquiring look upon the

accuser; the gleam of a sudden suspicion flashed through his mind, and he said:

"Be careful what you do; unless you have a good, sure and honest case, stop where you are; you will never beat Brandon otherwise; I tell you, he's lightning!"

"You appear to be under the influence of this villain, Brandon. I will pay you for past service and secure other counsel."

"As you please," said the lawyer, who had but slight acquaintance with Mr. Knight, and who had only been engaged for the nonce.

Knight paid the lawyer's demand, when the latter said:

"We are quits, Mr. Knight, and yet I will, in a friendly spirit, give you a little good advice. Do not 'buck' against Brandon unless you have a righteous cause, for within twenty-four hours, that man will have your history from the hour you were born! He's lightning, I tell you!"

"I am not asking for any more advice than what I have paid for!"

"All right, you may remember my words some day, and come to learn that it was the best advice you ever received, although it costs you nothing."

Having thus delivered himself, the lawyer walked away, rejoiced to have been discharged from the case, as within half an hour he had come to believe that Bayard Knight was a villain.

In the meantime, Burt Brandon had accompanied the prisoner from the court-room.

The detective had a private office, and once without the court he invited Renie Ruthendale to accompany him there and tell her story.

A few moments and the detective and his chosen client were seated *vis-à-vis*.

"Now, then, my dear young lady, tell me the whole truth; tell me your history from the beginning; speak to me as freely as you would were I your only brother; for as Heaven is my witness, I shall act as a brother toward you in this case!"

Renie's eyes were fixed upon the frank, handsome face of the man who was making to her these kindly assurances in the hour of her greatest need.

She beheld a handsome man not more than three-and-thirty. There was a rich melody in his voice, and a generous look upon his countenance.

She had never seen him before the moment he had come to her rescue in the court-room, and yet she felt that she could trust him as she would have trusted a father or a brother.

Besides, in all the world she had no other friend; but a most bitter foe, who had but recently been unmasked; and, still further, her beauty had run her into many perils. In tremulous tones she told her story.

## CHAPTER II.

### AN EXTRAORDINARY ROMANCE.

"I HAVE but a faint recollection of once living in a grand home, surrounded by every luxury and elegance.

"I remember a handsome man whom I called 'papa,' and a beautiful woman whom I called 'mamma'—and I was a happy child!

"I remember once wandering alone in a great park that surrounded the home of my infancy, when two men suddenly leaped from behind a hedge, something was thrown over my head, and I became unconscious.

"From that period until another epoch in my life, all was a blank.

"In fact, it was not until years afterward, that the faint remembrance that I still possess dawned in my mind."

"In plain words," said the detective, "you are satisfied that you were kidnapped in your infancy from your real parents?"

"Of that I am satisfied," answered Renie, and the tears welled to her beautiful eyes, as she added: "Since, mine has been a life of misery: now it seems as though I had been snatched from Paradise, and plunged amidst the horrors of hell itself!"

"What part has the man Bayard Knight played in your career?"

"I was performing, when but a child, with a circus company, when this man Bayard Knight came one night into the greenroom tent and sought out the man who claimed to be my father."

"Who was the man who claimed to be your father?"

"I believe he was one of the men who stole me from the home of my infancy. I had been trained by him to do perilous feats with himself."

"He was an actor?"

"Yes."

"You found yourself in his possession when you returned to consciousness, after having been kidnapped?"

"I did."

"Well, go on with your story."

"My duties as a performer always left me, child as I was, in an exhausted condition; and when this man Bayard Knight came into the greenroom tent I had just come from the ring."

"Whom did Knight first address, you or your reputed father?"

"My reputed father; I had lain down on a mattress, completely exhausted, and would have fallen asleep had not I been aroused by the words of the man, Knight."

"How old were you at this time?"

"I remember I was advertised in the bills as the wonderful baby Emma, only ten years old."

"How long had you been with your reputed father at this time?"

"A number of years, I know not how many."

"Do you remember the conversation between Knight and your reputed father?"

"Every word."

"Repeat it."

"Knight came in, sought out my reputed father, and said: 'You villain! I have found you at last!' My reputed father was known as Leon Leonardi, and when thus addressed, he turned pale and trembled from head to foot. Bayard Knight pointed toward where I was lying, and added: 'You scoundrel! I recognize that child, and shall hand you over to the detective, who are with me, at once!'

Burt Brandon leaned forward, and strained his ears to catch every word of this extraordinary tale.

"What reply did Leon Leonardi make?" asked the detective.

"An incoherent cry for mercy, accompanied by a declaration that he had had nothing to do with the abduction."

"Will you surrender the child?" asked Bayard Knight; and Leon Leonardi quickly agreed to do so, provided he should not be arrested."

"Did Bayard Knight assent to his proposition?"

"He did on condition that Leon Leonardi would surrender certain clothes and trinkets."

"What clothes and trinkets?"

"I am not certain, but I have always supposed that they must have been the articles that I wore at the time I was abducted from my home."

"Proceed with your story. What was your experience with Bayard Knight?"

"He spoke to me kindly, claimed to be my mother's brother, and said that he would take me and care for me as tenderly as though I were his own child."

"Did he keep his promise?"

"During the years of my childhood he did; I was clothed handsomely, placed at a fashionable boarding school, where I remained for eight years, and where I received the very best instruction."

"Did Bayard Knight visit you often?"

"About once a year."

"How about this charge of burglary he now makes against you?"

"About a year ago Bayard Knight took me from the school where I had lived for eight years, and brought me to his home in New York; a woman whom he claimed was his sister was his housekeeper, and to her he introduced me as his adopted daughter."

Burt Brandon's brain was busy at that moment, and yet he managed by a number of questions to develop the following revelation.

Bayard Knight had brought Renie Ruthendale to his home, and had treated her with the utmost tenderness, until one day when he suddenly declared to her his passion. Renie had recoiled from him at the bare suggestion of his love, and taxed him with being her mother's brother. It was then that he threw aside his mask and proclaimed that he was not related to her at all. He protested that he had been charmed by her beauty as a child, and had resolved to rescue her from the life she was leading, and educate her to become his bride.

Renie had always felt a strange and unaccountable repulsion toward the man, and during the few months that she had lived under the same roof with him, this feeling had devel-

oped into terror, mingled with hatred; she could not dispossess herself of the impression that, in some way, he had been instrumental in her abduction from the home of her infancy.

Bayard Knight had continued his declarations of deep passion, when, in a rash moment, Renie had declared that she knew more of her former life than he dreamed, and faintly suggested that he was criminally connected with the wrong that had been done her.

In relating the scene to Burt Brandon Renie told the extraordinary effect her words had had upon Bayard Knight.

His face assumed the hue of death; then curses long and deep burst from his lips, followed by threats against her, too horrible to repeat, if she even hinted to others the charge she had made against him.

His conduct confirmed Renie in her suspicions, and led her to believe that there was a most horrible mystery connected with her early life.

After the scene described, Bayard Knight's whole conduct changed. He tried by threats to force Renie to consent to become his wife.

The poor girl at length knew that the hour had come for her to escape.

Accordingly, she gathered together such articles as really belonged to her, and quietly left the house.

Her desire was to leave New York before her enemy could discover her.

As she was returning one night toward her humble lodgings, she met Bayard Knight face to face.

The girl uttered a suppressed scream and fled, and reaching her home without having been followed, as she supposed, congratulated herself upon her escape, and resolved the next day to fly the city.

Alas! she had but fallen into the meshes.

Two days passed, and she had not succeeded in getting away, when one night a man entered her room. The intruder commenced a search of her rooms, and found a number of articles in her trunk that she could have sworn she had never seen there in all her life before.

At once she was arrested on a charge of burglary, and taken to prison, when the events followed that have been heretofore recorded.

When Renie had concluded Burt Brandon said:

"I believe every word that you have told me. It's a neat job that has been 'put up' on you; but have no fears, I'll have the truth out of the matter in a manner that will astonish Mr. Bayard Knight; but now, my dear young lady, answer me one question. I see, by the court records, you gave the name of Renie Ruthendale?"

"I did."

"What claim have you to that name, or is it an assumed one?"

"Before Leon Leonardi gave me over into the possession of Bayard Knight, he slipped a written note into my hands, whispered to me to conceal it about my person, and some day when I learned how to read, mind well its contents."

"Did you keep the note?"

"I did."

"What was written in it?"

"But a few words. It was merely a warning that if ever I was thrown upon the world alone, to assume the name of Renie Ruthendale."

"My dear girl, Leon Leonardi did you one of the greatest services of your life when he gave you that note!" said Brandon, in a thoughtful tone.

## CHAPTER III.

### GETTING DOWN TO DEAD LEVEL.

In answer to the detective's remark, Renie said:

"Do you attach any great importance to the name?"

"I will tell you some day, after I have studied up certain matters that are not perfectly clear to me now; but answer me one question. When did you first assume that name?"

"When I fled from the house of Bayard Knight."

"Did you ever mention that name to his presence?"

"I never did."

"He heard it as applied to you in court?"

"He did."

"Were you observing him at the time?"

"I was."

"Did he exhibit any surprise when he heard the name?"

"The same deathly hue came over his face as upon the occasion when I first asserted that I had vivid recollections of my early life."

"I thought so," was Brandon's quiet comment, in a very suggestive tone. The detective had been studying the play of every feature of the girl sitting before him, as he listened to her wonderful story.

He noted clo-every little peculiarity in her personal appearance.

He did this from habit, little dreaming how soon he would be called upon to testify to what he now learned.

Renie Ruthendale possessed most peculiar hair; it was luxuriant and beautiful, long, and of a singular shade.

Burt Brandon, as he sat and watched the play of her beautiful features, experienced stranger feelings than had ever before agitated his heart.

He had never been in love. His experience had been amidst scenes too exciting to allow of his indulgence in any tender sentiment.

He boasted oftentimes that he was *proof* against female fascination, and yet in a very few moments a deep impression had been made upon his heart.

He had seen the girl before him less than two hours, and yet was compelled to admit to himself, that she had created an interest such as he had never felt for any living being.

"You must return to your lodgings, Miss Ruthendale," said Brandon.

A shadow fell across the maiden's lovely face.

Brandon noted the change in her countenance, and said:

"I have a purpose in having you return to your former lodgings; and now listen to me, I have undertaken your case; from this forward I am devoted to the solution of the mystery of your life."

"Oh, no; you must not pledge yourself to any such undertaking!" exclaimed Renie in a deprecating tone.

"My dear lady, you can not drive me from my purpose. I am at leisure now!"

"But I have no means to pay you for your services."

A strange expression shot across the detective's face, as he replied:

"I am not seeking for money."

A look of horror fell across Renie's countenance.

Again Brandon noticed the change of expression, and interpreted its meaning.

At once he caught her fair little hand in his strong grasp, and fixing his eyes upon her, said:

"Renie Ruthendale, listen; you must never doubt my honor; you and I have a great work before us; you are the victim of some most horrible villainy. I am to be as a brother to you. You can trust me!"

Renie felt that she could trust him.

"Now, listen again," said Brandon. "I wish to 'pipe' this man Bayard Knight. If you return to your former lodgings he will come prowling around there, and I will have a chance to take his measure."

"I will do as you say."

"And one word more, Miss Ruthendale; excuse me for speaking right out plainly, but I must offer you money, and you must accept it."

Renie threw up her hands deprecatingly. The color came to her cheeks, and her eyes fell as she exclaimed:

"Oh, no! no! no!"

"Indeed, but listen! It shall be but a loan, on my honor! I will permit you to repay me some day! And now do not offer any more objections."

The detective succeeded in his purpose, then told Renie that she need have no fears for her safety in her lodgings, as she would be under constant surveillance against her toe.

At length Renie was dismissed, and Burt Brandon sat down to think over the strange incidents that had been related to him.

He was still lost in deep thought, when there came a rap at his office door.

A moment later a man entered.

One glance was sufficient. The intruder was Bayard Knight.

"Your name is Brandon?"

"That is my name."

"You are on the ball bond for a young woman who committed burglary at my house?"

Burt Brandon fixed his keen eyes upon Knight, and replied in a peculiarly strange tone:

"Don't fool, old man! come right down to business!"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't chaff. I am only taking grain to-day."

"Please explain yourself!" exclaimed Knight, drawing himself up in an indignant manner.

"Well, you know that that young lady did not commit any burglary at your house, and so do I know the same thing."

"If she did not commit any burglary at my house I must be laboring under some strange mistake."

"Oh, do not give us any more liquorice; come right down to your *curbace*."

"You are talking in riddles."

"So are you."

"I asked you a plain question."

"You told me a plain lie!"

"How, sir?"

"You said that I was on the bail-bond of the young lady who had committed a burglary at your house; now, you know, and I know, that the young lady did not commit any burglary at your house."

"I see what you are driving at," said Knight.

"Well, so much the better."

"You want me to fee you handsomely to get out of this case."

"Well, I would like to get a heavy stake."

"That is what you meant by business?"

"Maybe so."

"I understand you; and to save myself trouble, if you will go and surrender that girl, up again, I will give you two hundred and fifty dollars."

"That is not money enough."

"I'll make it five hundred."

"Raise it."

"I can not give more."

"Oh! yes, you can."

"I'll make it a thousand!"

"Lift it again."

"Not another cent."

"All right; I am the girl's friend."

"See here, you may run against a snag, Brandon," said Knight, in a threatening tone.

"You have run against one, Knight."

"I see your game. I will give you five thousand dollars to clear out of this matter."

A strange smile came over Burt Brandon's face, and he said:

"Look here, Knight, don't you see I've dropped on you? How dare you offer me five thousand only?"

Knight's voice was husky, as he asked:

"How do you mean?"

"Ah! I've been studying into your past history!"

Bayard Knight remembered the words of his counsel: "That man will have your whole history down, from the time you were a baby, in twenty-four hours."

"Name how much money you will take to return that girl to custody."

"I will not return her to custody even for all the stolen Ruthendale estate!"

A yell burst from Bayard Knight's lips, and as his face became purple, he drew from under his coat a cocked revolver; but before he could raise it, Brandon had a bead on him, and said:

"See here, my friend, don't raise your arm, or you will go down!"

Bayard Knight did not dare raise his pistol.

He knew by reputation the man he was dealing with.

"Brandon, will you deal with me, or against me?"

"Ah! hal you have come down to a dead level, eh?"

"How shall it be?"

"I am going to play against you."

"You can have a big stake."

"I am going to fight the girl!"

"All right! you are the king of the detectives, and I am only Bayard Knight, a plain citizen! I will play against you!" And as Knight spoke, he left the room.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE MYSTERY OF THE FLOATING HEAD.

BURT BRANDON smiled in a quiet manner as Bayard Knight went out.

Upon the following day, the detective called to see Renie Ruthendale.

Her landlady informed him that the girl had gone out the night before, and had not returned.

Burt Brandon was not a man who could easily lose his nerve, but, when he received this intelligence, a cold shudder ran over his frame.

He positively told Renie not to leave her apartment until he had given her permission.

"Did she say where she was going?"

"No, sir."

"What do you know about your young lady boarder?" asked the detective.

"What do I know about her?"

"Yes."

"I know nothing that is bad, and everything that is good; she was as honest and virtuous as she was beautiful, and as kind and generous as she was accomplished."

The landlady's tone indicated that she feared the detective was one of her late boarder's enemies, and laid greater stress upon her words in consequence.

"Madam, I believe every word that you say. I am Renie Ruthendale's friend. I went her bail yesterday."

"Oh! you are that wonderful man, Brandon, the detective!"

"I am Brandon, the detective."

"I know you, sir, although you may not remember me; my son was once accused of robbing his employer; you were employed upon the case, you questioned my son, satisfied yourself that he was innocent, and told him you would prove it."

"I did as I promised!"

"You did, sir; and you saved that young man's character."

"I remember the case, it occurred ten years ago."

"Yes, sir, and my son is still in the employ of the men who were his accusers at that time."

"I am glad to hear it, Mrs. Marion. I remember you now; and now tell me have you any suspicion as to where Miss Ruthendale went? I am going to save her from false charges, as I saved your son."

"Mr. Brandon, I do not know where she has gone. I have passed a sleepless night waiting for her."

"Have you entered her room?"

"I have not."

"Will you permit me to make a search there?"

"The door is locked."

"No matter, I can open it."

"It would not be right to enter the room during her absence."

"Madam, Renie Ruthendale has a bitter foe, who, I am satisfied, would not hesitate to murder her; we may save her life by taking instant measures to find out where she has gone."

"Come this way, sir."

The house where Miss Ruthendale had lodged was a small, two-story brick, in a plain neighborhood.

The young lady had occupied the second floor bedroom.

Burt Brandon drew a curious little instrument from his pocket, inserted it in the keyhole, and by a dexterous twist, sprung the lock.

The room was plainly furnished, but in most perfect order.

The bed had not been slept in.

The officer went to the closet, and found her little stock of clothing hanging on the pegs.

"When she went out," he said, "she meant to return, as she has taken none of her clothing."

In a husky voice the landlady asked:

"Could she have gone to drown herself, sir?"

"I think not. Do you remember what time she went out?"

"It was about nine o'clock in the evening."

"Did she say anything as to when she would return?"

"No, sir."

"Did she receive any notes or letters, do you know?"

"As I remember now, about dark a messenger boy did bring a note for her."

"Who delivered it?"

"I did."

"Was there any answer sent back?"

"No, sir."

"Did she make any remark?"

"No, sir."

But Brandon commenced a most thorough search of the rooms.

After a while he said:

"She must have taken the note with her."

"Have you looked in her trunk?"

"I have looked everywhere but in that fire grate," answered the officer, and he stepped across the room, and in an instant exclaimed:

"Here it is, and the mystery is solved! Treachery has lured the girl from her home, and ere this she is in the hands of her assassin! but as there is a just Heaven above us I will discover and save her, or bring her murderer to justice, though the pursuit occupies the rest of my days!"

The note the detective had found ran as follows:

"MISS RUTHENDALE.—It is necessary that I should see you at once! Meet me at the corner of — Street at ten minutes past nine; do not fail, as the establishment of your innocence depends upon your meeting me. You will run no risk, as I will see you are protected.

"BRANDON."

The detective scanned the note critically, and muttered to himself:

"The scoundrel used my name to lure her from her home; a cunning trick. The corner where she was to meet him is but a hundred yards from the river! My God! I hope I am not too late, and only vengeance remains to me."

The detective left a few directions with Mrs. Marion, and departed.

For five days our hero searched high and low for some clew that would lead him toward a solution of the fate of the beautiful Renie.

He shadowed Bayard Knight morning, noon, and night.

He questioned the residents of every house along the route the missing girl would most likely have taken in going to the corner named in the note.

Not a single person could he find who had caught even a glimpse of any one answering Renie's description.

Burt Brandon did not despair.

He had undertaken harder jobs, and after months of patient "piping," had run down to the truth.

He had the river dragged along the front near where the supposed meeting took place, but the waters gave nothing forth to reward him.

Two other bodies were found, but not the beautiful form of the missing girl.

It would naturally be supposed that Brandon could have taxed Knight with knowing something concerning the girl's fate.

Such a mode, however, was furthest from his thoughts.

He did not let the man know that he was searching for the lost one.

All his inquiries were secret and on the quiet.

There would be time enough to tax Bayard Knight; and when Burt did tax him, it would be when he knew well his premises.

The detective did not doubt for one moment but that Knight was at the bottom of the girl's disappearance, and he was determined before he got through to get the upper stroke on the villain.

A month passed.

Brandon had discovered nothing—not the faintest clew; and yet every morning he started to find a fresh trail, and spent his nights in weighing every possibility.

One day, as usual, he took up the paper to see what the previous day had discovered in the way of mysteries.

Not a female body had been taken to the morgue but had undergone his inspection.

One glance at the paper sent a cold chill to his heart.

A most terrible crime had come to light, but the manner in which it had been perpetrated, was a most awful mystery.

Two boys had been boating, and toward night had hauled their boat into the shore at the base of a ledge of rocks.

A conduit from the hills above opened into the river just where the boys landed.

It was not yet dark, and one of the lads had leaped from the boat, and the other was about to follow, when he saw something floating just at the mouth of the conduit.

A cry burst from his lips, and he called his companion's attention to it.

The second lad's face blanched, and in a husky voice he exclaimed:

"It's a human head!"

The boys did not dare touch the ghastly object, but ran up the bank to where some men were at work.

To the latter they told what they had discovered.

The men hastened down to the place, and there, sure enough, lay the ghastly object in the incoming tide.

One of the men reached forward his hand and drew the object from the water.

A cry of astonishment fell from the lips of all gathered there under the glare of the red sun set.

It was the head of a woman; long, rich hair fell down more than thirty inches as the man laid it afloat.

The features were not distinguishable, and yet

that beautiful head of hair would serve to identify its owner.

The nose remained intact, and the beautiful penciled eyebrows about the eyeless sockets.

The mouth was disfigured, but two rows of pearly teeth remained.

A search had been made for the rest of the remains, but up to the time the paper had gone to press they had not been discovered.

A wild gleam set in Burt Brandon's eyes as he concluded reading the horrid account.

"Bayard Knight," he muttered, "you have played a desperate game, but Burt Brandon is on your track!"

That same hour the king of the detectives started for the scene of the tragedy, and during the following day laid together a number of clews leading to the development of a most wonderful chain of circumstances.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE DETECTIVE ON AN EXTRAORDINARY TRAIL.

It was but one hour's ride from the city, where the floating head had been found.

The ghastly relic was in the hands of the county justice, who had the matter in charge.

When Brandon reached the court-house he found a large crowd of people gathered round, anxious to see the object, and discussing the probable circumstances of the horrible tragedy.

A constable was guarding the entrance to the building.

Brandon advanced, and showing a shield, requested to be admitted.

The constable, who was an ignorant fellow suddenly clothed in a "little brief authority," ordered him back, denying him admission.

"Do you see I am an official?"

"I do not care who you are, yet cannot come no fire-ice dodge on me. I lets no one in this 'eve house, do you mind?"

"Why, you old goose, don't you see that is a police officer's insignia?"

"I don't care whose sign it is. I've got charge here, and I am too smart to let a city chicken come any gum games over me."

"You're a born fool!"

"Look here, mister, don't give me any of your slack because I don't let yer in, or I'll just lock you up till you cool off."

"For two crackers I would tweak your nose, you ignorant puppy!"

At that moment a gentleman approached toward whom the constable showed considerable deference.

The new-comer glanced a moment sharply at the detective, and exclaimed:

"Is not this Mr. Brandon?"

"That is my name."

"Good, sir; but you of all men are just the man we want here at this moment. Come this way."

The constable stared while the detective passed him and followed the gentleman, who was the county's prosecuting officer, into the building.

"One moment, Mr. Anderson," said the detective. "You must not again call me by name, or reveal my identity."

"Aht! I understand, I'll call you Mr. Smith."

"Any name will do; and now show me the object."

The district attorney led the detective into a side room, where several men were assembled around a table standing in the center of the floor.

A white cloth was thrown over the table, which bulged in the middle, revealing to the eye aided by the imagination, a most hideous outline.

Mr. Anderson raised the cloth, and a most horrible sight was presented to the starting eyes of Burt Brandon.

A most beautifully formed human head lay upon the table.

The detective approached, and fixed his eyes upon it.

It was a head of most exquisite contour, and the most extraordinary matter was that tell-tale wealth of auburn hair.

Burt Brandon possessed a wonderful eye, and a most remarkable memory.

During the long interview he had held with Renie Ruthendale he had closely examined every feature of her face.

He had not done so from any premonition of

what was to follow, but in accordance with a habit that had grown with his profession.

One glance was sufficient; the hair, in its peculiar beauty, pronounced that he was gazing on the bodiless head of what had once been Renie Ruthendale.

In his own mind he was satisfied; but a head of hair, no matter how peculiar nor how beautiful, was not, in itself, a sufficient identification.

Burt Brandon took the head in his hands, and carried it to the light, and his eyes fell upon the two rows of pearly teeth.

Muttering to himself, he said: "Her teeth! And there are the peculiar little treble marks on her temple!"

Those assembled in the room had come to the conclusion that the detective was a relative searching for a missing one, and watched anxiously his every movement.

Still more closely did the officer examine the ghastly relic, and his eyes, aided by his acute memory, discovered other little marks in the disfigured face that convinced him that a most foul murder had been perpetrated, and that he had recognized the victim.

The district attorney came toward the detective, and asked:

"What do you make out?"

"Nothing!" was the curt answer. Brandon was not the man to give any suspicions; he only opened his head when he had bare facts to establish. "Where are the boys," he asked, "who found this head?"

"I can produce them at once."

"Do so."

The boys were held under bail, and were summoned.

The detective took them in a room by themselves, and questioned them closely.

They had little to tell more than had already been made public.

They had been fishing, and on returning had found the object floating in the water as described.

"Was the tide running in or out?"

"Running out."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"And you found the head just at the mouth of the conduit?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not notice anything else?"

"No sir."

"Did you look?"

"Yes."

"Will you go and show me just where you found the floating head?"

The boys agreed.

"Go to your home, and, within half an hour, go separately to the place; do not tell any one where you are going, and I will meet you there, and I will pay you well for your time, on condition that you keep close mouths, and do not whisper to a living soul where you are going."

"Oh, we can get down there by the river without any one's knowing it."

"Do so; and wait until I come."

An hour later the detective met the lads on the river shore.

They were cute and intelligent, and again described all the incidents of the discovery, and pointed out just the exact spots connected with it.

Brandon took the bearings, and dismissed the lads.

That same afternoon no less than ten different persons visited the court-house, anxious to inspect the portion of the remains that had been found.

Our hero had stationed himself near the table, and was present as each one of the searchers came in and made their examination.

Some most sad life experiences were revealed.

The old story of a dozen mysteries came to light through this one discovery.

Late in the afternoon a veiled woman entered the room.

She did not remove her veil at first, but gazed through its folds on the head.

A moment and a great sob burst from her lip, and she would have fallen to the floor.

The detective caught her in his arms, drew her toward a window, tore aside her veil, and removed her bonnet to give her air.

A startling sight was revealed that almost caused him to drop the fainting woman from his arms.

A wealth of hair as peculiar in its color, as long and as rich as the tresses on the dead head floated forth.

It chanced that at that moment no other per-

son save himself, the fainting woman, and the district attorney were present.

Both men exchanged significant looks as every means were used to restore the woman to consciousness.

They at length succeeded, when the detective said:

"I'll show the clo', over that *thing*!"

The woman, after a time, fully recovered and commenced to mow in a low, agonized manner, while tears flowed freely down her cheeks.

The detective was a patient man, and kindly and sympathizing in his manner.

He had studied the woman's face.

She was not handsome, and did not bear the slightest resemblance to the missing Revie Ruthendale.

The only remarkable feature was that strange rich wealth of long auburn hair.

The woman was fully thirty years of age.

After her emotion had somewhat subsided, the detective asked, in a low, kindly voice:

"Madam, do you recognize the remains?"

"I do! oh, yes, it is the head of my murdered sister!"

"By what means do you identify it?"

"Her hair."

"Do you suspect any one who would have a motive for murdering your sister?"

"No one on earth."

"Your sister is missing?"

"Since ten weeks."

"When did you last see her?"

"I have not seen her in life for a year past."

"Was she a married woman?"

"No, sir."

"Under what circumstances did she live when last you saw her?"

"Ah, sir, do not compel me to confess a family sorrow—a family shame!"

"Madam, a great crime has been committed; that gentleman there is the prosecuting officer of the county; we are asking these questions in the interest of justice."

With a terrible sob the woman gasped out:

"My sister was led astray by an evil man, and this is the end!"

"Have you no other marks save the hair to identify your sister?"

"Yes, yes, I am sure it is she. I recognized the head at the first glance; I could have identified it had the rich long hair been missing."

"How old would your sister have been?"

"Two-and-twenty."

"Madam, there is grave reason to think that after all I have made a mistake."

## CHAPTER VI.

### "PIPING" FOR STRANGE GAME.

BRANDON arranged with the lady to see her at another time, and after another glance at the head and an outburst of grief, the woman departed.

The district attorney said:

"I believe the mystery is solved!"

The detective smiled grimly, and answered:

"It has but deepened; that woman is missing."

"Her identification was positive."

"Yes; and you may yet witness a dozen positive identifications."

"Is she a fraud?"

"I have not decided. I will test her."

"What object could any one have to make such a claim?"

There are strange people in this world; innocent men have confessed murders; honest women have proclaimed themselves court-suns; and I have known good men to glory in the acquaintance of expert burglars. This woman may be a sort of odd person, who recognizes a good chance to win a little notoriety, and possibly a little substantial sympathy."

"But the hair—the similarity of the hair!"

"Ah, there's the rub, and there's the mystery. I know another person who has not only recognized the hair on that poor head, but other minute and tell-tale marks."

"I did not know that!"

"I have a written description there; you take it and compare it."

The detective had written down in his note-book a description of Revie Ruthendale, within ten minutes after she had left him, the day he had gone her bail.

He had forgotten the circumstance, but recalled it afterward, and he now thought it a

good opportunity to test his suspicions, through another's acuteness.

The strict attorney glanced over the written description of Revie Ruthendale, and then made a comparison.

As he proceeded, exclamations of astonishment burst from his lips, and at length he exclaimed:

"That description was written by some one who has seen that head!"

"On my word of honor, that was written some weeks ago; it is a description of a living person."

"Great Heaven! if you speak truly the mystery deepens; that woman with the similar hair must be a fraud."

"Not necessarily so."

"Then your description was of her sister in life."

"No; it was of a person who could not possibly be that woman's sister."

"I shall order that creature's arrest for attempted fraud."

"Not so fast."

"You astonish me beyond measure."

"You may yet be more astonished, that woman may be perfectly honest. We shall find out by and by, but the first thing to do is to discover the body from which that head was severed."

"That I do not believe will ever be accomplished."

"I think it will, and in the meantime keep a shadow over that woman, say nothing to her of our suspicions, and keep silent, concerning anything that has been said between us. I may have startling news for you by morning."

The detective went to the depot and found that his trunk, which he had ordered sent after him, had arrived.

By arrangement he took lodgings at the house of the squire.

About midnight a man dressed in the garb of a boatman, or common river man, left the house of the squire.

He proceeded directly to the river, and followed the shore toward the point where the floating head had been found.

As he walked along he glanced round, and seeing that no one was near, indulged in a little audible soliloquizing, a common habit to keen and thoughtful men.

"I believe that woman was honest; if the head is not that of her sister she is deceived; I do not believe she is a fraud. I don't think that false grief can be played upon me. I'm too old a bird. The clothing will settle the matter. I must find the balance of the remains, and I think that one part of the mystery will be solved."

Thus muttered Burt Brandon, as he stole along toward the entrance to the conduit.

The latter was a broad subterranean passage way, for some distance of sufficient area to admit the passage of a boat.

When the detective reached the place he leaped into a boat that he had had anchored near there for the purpose he had in view.

Once in the boat he seated himself and drew from his person a pair of revolvers.

These he carefully examined, and, after replacing them, drew forth a large bowie-knife which was submitted to a careful scrutiny.

"I guess all is right," he remarked, and taking an oar, he forced his boat through the mouth of the conduit.

Once inside, he drew forth a lantern, lighted it, placed it in the prow of his boat, and commenced forcing his way forward.

He thus penetrated for some hundreds of feet, when he came to the end of the tide level.

Crawling from his boat he took his lantern and prepared to penetrate still further by crawling on his hands and knees along the damp, muddy passage.

He had proceeded but a few feet when his eye rested upon an article lying in the mud that caused him to utter a peculiar cry.

Flashing the light of his lantern upon the article he reached forward his hand, and drew from the mud a handsomely carved and cut woman's hair-comb.

"By heavens, I am on the right track!" he muttered, and was proceeding on the investigation when he heard the splash of an oar.

"What! have I been followed?" cried the detective, in a low voice, as he slid the mask of his bull's-eye lantern, and strained his ear to listen.

A moment passed, and he felt assured that he detected the sound of human voices.

He walked back toward his boat.

Again he listened, and most certainly heard theplash, splash of a boat as it cut through the thick water.

A moment more and he saw the red glare of a light, and, watching, became satisfied that it was placed in the prow of a boat that was being propelled through the passage.

Burt Brandon had a game of his own to play—a discovery to make, in which he did not desire to have anyone join him.

The men in the boat were most likely on the same errand as himself.

They were rough, uncouth men, as he overheard them cursing among themselves.

The men in the boat had reached to within twenty feet of where the detective was standing, when suddenly a pistol flash illuminated the darkness and broke the stillness.

The detective had fired a shot hoping to frighten the men off.

As it happened, they did not scare so easily.

Instead of pushing their boat on a backward course they commenced blazing away toward the point where the detective stood.

The latter was compelled to drop face forward in the sand, to save himself being riddled with bullets.

He was in a tight spot.

Brandon remembered that a reward had been offered for the discovery of the balance of the mutilated remains, and concluded that the men in the boat were on the same errand as himself.

But the conversation, which now reached his ears, undeceived him.

"Blast my eyes, lads! If there was any sucker trying to git in ahead of us yer, I reckon he his quietus has got."

"Who do yer think it is that's got on to the little drop?"

The detective strained his ears, and a look of singular intelligence flashed across his face.

That one expression of one of the men had offered a whole mine of clews to him.

The men in the boat were not after the reward, although they might be after the mutilated body.

If such were the fact they had been sept.

The detective was in a strange dilemma.

Had he been in any other place than this three-feet-high passage he might have known just what to do.

The men still continued their conversation.

"What do yer think, I guess we've run him out who ever he wer'; we just had him like a weasel in its hole."

"There's one thing, boys, I told yer, as we were pullin' across the river, that I seed a light in the mouth of the hill's gut."

"That ain't here nor there; the question is, what shall we do?"

The men lowered their voices, and no one but a man with ears as keen as the detective could have overheard the details of their plan.

As it was, Brandon did hear it, and arranging his bowie-knife, prepared to play a desperate game.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A COMBAT IN A SEWER.

It was evident that the men in the boat were satisfied that there was a chance that the man they had been blazing away at had escaped being hit.

The seeming leader of the gang said, in a low voice:

"Tom, I didn't hear no groan, and it's a question whether we upset the covey who let us have the first bang."

"Guess that he's caved in, sure; but, however, it is just as well to be on the safe side."

"One of us had better take a *staker* and crawl forward; the apartments are gettin' kinder narrier around here."

"All right! who'll sail ahead?"

"Well, I guess yer might as well hire that job out to this 'ere covey."

"Go it, Bob, you were always good at findin' corpses."

Burt Brandon drew some distance back, and calmly awaited the corpse-finder's approach.

He did not have long to wait. He heard a slight splash in the water, and a second later managed to discern a dark body crawling toward him.

'Twas an awful moment, and an awful place for a hand-to-hand conflict.

The detective did not wish to kill the man if he could avoid it, but he held his own life under the circumstances, as more precious than that of his unknown foe.

The fellow had approached so near in the darkness that the detective could have extended his hand and placed it on his head.

"See here, boys," called the man, coming to a halt; "I just reckon that there's no corpse up this way; so be prepared for squalls in a moment."

The man evidently began to weaken.

He knew that, in case the unseen chap who had fired the pistol were on the outlook, the advantages lay on his side.

His companions evidently took his remark as a sign of weakening, as one of them called out:

"Do you want to let out the job, my covey?"

"Not much!" answered the man, and he commenced to crawl forward.

One more stretch, and he would have been right on top of the detective.

The moment had come for the latter to act.

He reached out his hand, and knew just where, with fearful precision, to land it, which was upon the man's throat.

His vice-like fingers closed with such a powerful grasp so suddenly that his enemy was speechless before he realized what had occurred.

The detective leaned forward and whispered in the fellow's ear:

"Make the least movement, and I'll drive my knife through you."

The man might have made a struggle, but within a second he had learned that he had met a foeman worthy of his steel, and he remained perfectly quiet.

Brandon always went prepared for emergencies, and in less time than it takes to record it, had the man gagged and handcuffed, when he drew his body forward, and, in a voice imitative of his victim's, called out:

"I say, Tom, one of you bucks just come this way. I think I've got my eye on the toad!"

"All right, my covey!" came the unsuspecting response, and, in a second, Brandon became aware that fellow number two was crawling toward him.

The same scene followed.

The detective had secured two of the chaps, and but one remained.

He now changed his tactics, and became the aggressor by crawling toward the boat.

When under the bow he drew his lantern, slid the mask, suddenly rose to his feet, and blinding the light in the remaining man's eyes, put a revolver to his nose and commanded him to surrender.

The man uttered a cry both of surprise and alarm, and made a movement as though to lift his pistol; but a smart blow on the temple keeled him over in the boat, and in a moment he was bound as securely as his companions.

Burt Brandon had accomplished a goodly job, and chuckled to himself as he proceeded to make his prisoners secure against any attempt at escape.

Then he had an opportunity to renew his investigations.

He was quite jubilant, feeling assured that he had not only come upon the body, but secured the perpetrators of the horrid deed, catching them in their own trap.

Again he commenced crawling through the watercourse.

He had advanced about twenty feet beyond the point where he had had the encounter with the men, when, in reaching his hand forward, it came against something cold and stiff that caused him to withdraw it as suddenly as though he had laid it on the shining body of a poisonous serpent.

His confusion lasted but an instant. Bringing his light forward, his eyes fell upon a sight that caused a shudder to tremble over his frame.

This man, who, but a few minutes before, faced death on his own account, did not then show half the trepidation caused by the ghastly object revealed to him.

Before him, smeared with mud and slime, lay a headless trunk.

Close examination revealed the fact that the body was clad in a simple wrapper.

Brandon commenced a thorough search for other articles of clothing.

It was upon the discovery of the latter that he depended for a more complete assurance of his identification of the dead girl.

"It's strange," he muttered, "that I should find that bonnet, and yet discover the body in this shape."

The search, however, failed to reveal any additional clothing.

The detective drew the body toward where

his boat lay, and soon had the ghastly object in the bottom.

He found his prisoners lying quiet and snug as he had left them.

He put them one after another into his boat, and pushed out toward the entrance.

He was compelled to shove the boat belonging to the prisoners ahead of his own, and in such shape glided out under the bright starlight on to the river.

Taking his own boat he ran it ashore, secured it, and then led his prisoners on to the beach.

Here he tied them together, and removing the gags from their mouths, ordered them to march.

"Hold on, boss. What are you going to do with us?"

"March, and say nothing!"

"If you think we had anything to do with the murder of that gal ye have in the boat you are mistaken!"

"March!"

"We were only huntin' for that body to secure the reward that we knew would soon be offered for the finding of it."

"How did you know where to look for it so snug?"

"Well, wasn't it natural to think that the body would be found somewhere near where the head was found?"

There was truth in the fellow's statement, and Brandon had already concluded that it was possible that his prisoners had had nothing to do with the murder.

The men were led to the lock-up; the jailer was aroused, the district attorney sent for, and the men put in cells.

Mr. Anderson, the attorney, was greatly excited, and when a chance offered, he asked:

"Have you found the body?"

"Come with me," was the detective's curt reply.

"The prisoners—are they the assassins?"

"I cannot tell yet, although I should not be surprised if they were innocent of the murder. I have a test for them that will tell the story," and the detective proceeded and related the circumstances under which the men were captured.

"And you captured those three villains alone in that horrid place?"

"Well, yes; and I think I could have frozen on a dozen more."

"No wonder you are called the king of the detectives, Mr. Brandon."

"I have yet to sustain my claim to that title; we are just at the beginning of the developments in this terrible mystery."

Brandon led the district attorney down to the boat where the ghastly remains lay.

When he drew aside the covering and exposed the body Mr. Anderson recoiled with a cry of horror, and would have fallen to the ground in sheer fright, if the detective had not caught hold of him.

"We must carry the body to the courthouse."

"We!" exclaimed Mr. Anderson, with a shudder.

"Yea."

"Never! I would not put my hand on that object for a thousand dollars!"

"What shall we do?"

"You remain here and I will go and send down Murray, the sexton and undertaker."

"All right! go and send him down. I did not wish a third party into the matter until you and I had made an examination, but it does not make much difference."

Murray the undertaker was aroused, and removed the horrid object to the back room in his shop, and there at midnight, under the glare of many lamps, Brandon made a most thorough examination.

He could not find a single wound upon the body.

A doctor was summoned and a superficial autopsy commenced, but the physician was compelled to admit that he could not discover anything that would indicate the mode of death.

The following day the news spread that the balance of the body had been found, and the usual excitement followed, associated with a thousand and one different rumors.

Brandon made a second visit to the conduit where he had found the body.

He took an assistant with him, and with powerful lamps made a most thorough search for some signs of a struggle.

He found none, and was forced to the conclusion that the body had been brought and deposited in the conduit after death.

Not the least clew could he discover to aid him in trailing toward the point from whence the body had been carried.

As he returned toward the village after the search he muttered to himself, "I'm only baffled for a while! I'll run the thing down yet!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DETECTIVE'S DEATH TEST

A few days passed and no new developments were discovered.

The stomach of the dead girl had been sent to the city to be examined for poison, and, after photographs of the head had been made, the remains were turned over to the woman who had claimed that the victim was her sister.

The public and press were allowed to think that the identity of the murdered girl had been established; and the only question that remained was, who had had a hand in the murder.

The three prisoners had been kept in close confinement under the instructions of the detective, and had not been, in any way, associated with the affair, so that the outside public could get a hold of it.

Brandon had several interviews with the veiled woman who had claimed the body, and had assured himself that she was perfectly honest in her belief, although he was satisfied in his own mind that the mutilated remains were not those of her sister; and, in that belief, had offered money to cover all her expenses, but, as she assured him that she had abundance of means, he let matters take their course.

At the end of two weeks the expert who had made an examination of the stomach settled the matter as to the manner of death, and confirmed the suspicions of the doctors that the head had been severed from the body after death.

The matter had about quieted down, and the public were prepared for some fresh sensation, when Brandon, who had been waiting for such a result, set out to run the matter down.

He went to the prison, and when alone with one of the men whom he had captured, announced, abruptly, that a man named Bayard Knight had come forward and offered to go their bail.

The man answered by asking, with an oath, who Bayard Knight was.

The detective had been watching the fellow, and was satisfied that he certainly did not know the man named.

He put the same test to each of the others separately, and was convinced that they had nothing to do with the man Knight.

The establishment of this fact was a strong point in their favor, according to the detective's conceived theories, and after a careful search in various directions, he ordered the men discharged.

All the incidents had passed from the public mind when Brandon returned to the city.

Like a shadow he hovered on the track of Bayard Knight, but in such a disguise that his man never recognized him.

One night Bayard Knight was in his parlor, when a servant announced that an old man wished to see him.

"Show him in!" was the command.

A moment later and an old man, dressed in the garb of a plain farmer, was shown into the presence of Bayard Knight.

The latter surveyed his visitor from head to foot, and, in a stern voice, demanded his business.

"I have brought you a letter," said the old man.

"From whom?"

The old man looked round in every direction, and stammered out that he did not dare to tell, if there was any chance that the name would be overheard.

Bayard Knight was ostensibly a broker, and living in handsome style, was supposed to be a man of wealth.

"Are you sure no one is listening?" asked the old man.

"Come, old friend, you must do your business and be gone; if you have a letter to deliver to me, do so!"

The old man drew a letter from his pocket and with a trembling hand passed it over to Knight.

The latter stepped to a center table on which a student's lamp stood, and thrust the letter

under the clear light, to glance at the writing on the envelope.

Over the mantel was a large mirror.

Bayard Knight chanced to glance in the mirror, and caught a reflection of the old man's face.

The reflection shone out in clear, bold relief—the old man was leaning forward with his eyes fastened upon Knight in the most fixed and startling manner.

The man Knight proved himself a cool head, and a man of most excellent nerve.

He did not betray by look or movement his discoveries, but his suspicions were aroused, and he was on his guard for some startling development.

Coolly and deliberately he opened the letter, and as he glanced at the contents not a muscle of his face moved.

Turning around after reading it he said, in the most cool and commonplace manner:

"I can do nothing for Miss Ruthendale, she has fled from my protection; besides, she robbed me, and did I know her whereabouts I would prosecute her for the theft."

Not a muscle in his face betrayed the slightest emotion, and there was not the least sign of trepidation in his voice.

"Then you can do nothing for her?"

"Do you know the contents of this note, old man?"

"I do."

"Well, never mind, I will read it to you," and in a quiet, steady manner, he read as follows:

"DEAR GUARDY,—I regret having fled from your kind protection. I have met with nothing but sorrow and suffering, and I do pray that you will send me some money by bearer, or what is better still, your permission to return once more to your care and loving protection.

RENNIE RUTHENDALE."

When Bayard Knight had finished reading he asked:

"Where is this young lady? To what address shall I send a note, in case I wish to do so?"

"I am not at liberty to give her address."

"Who are you? What is your name? How can I communicate with you?"

"My name is Brown, Jabez Brown. A letter sent to the general post-office will reach me."

Bayard Knight held the letter in his hand, and stepped toward the visitor, remarking:

"Your name is Brown, eh? Jabez Brown?"

Suddenly Knight sprung forward, but a blow planted square between his eyes sent him reeling across the room with great force against the opposite wall.

In an instant, and as soon as he recovered himself, he drew a pistol; but the old man followed him up and, before he could shoot, wrenched it from his grasp.

"That won't do, sir!" said the old man.

Bayard Knight gritted his teeth, and his eyes flamed and blazed with furious wrath as he hissed:

"Your name is Brown, eh? Jabez Brown? You deceitful, disgusting, lying villain! I know who you are, and you shall suffer for this outrage!"

Bayard Knight had suspected a disguise, and when he leaped forward it was his intention to tear the wig and other false signs from the pretended old man and expose him then and there.

The manner in which his little maneuver was frustrated convinced him that his suspicions were well founded.

When he exclaimed, "I know your game!" the seeming old man replied:

"I stopped yours!"

"Mr. Brandon, I do not know your purpose in stealing into my house in this guise, bringing a forged note with you; but again I tell you, you shall pay for this outrage! I have money and influence sufficient to protect me against a repetition of this conduct."

"You may need all your money and influence, Bayard Knight, or, rather, Thomas Kronburgh!"

Upon the mention of the latter name a spasm shot over Knight's face, but in a steady voice he answered:

"You must go somewhere else to find a man to answer to that name. It is a new one to me."

"Before you and I are through with each other, Mr. Kronburgh, you may recognize it after. Good-night, sir."

"You had better not seek to cross my path,

Burt Brandon; it may prove dangerous in the end!"

"Murderer! poisoner! secret assassin! I am on your track until I run you to earth!"

"Leave this house!"

"I will leave simply because I am through with my business to-night; otherwise I would remain a week!"

"Leave now, or I'll send for the police, and see whether or not you can thus intrude into the private residence of a citizen."

"Send for the police, but mark me, if you do, I will aid them to solve the mystery of the floating head."

Bayard Knight laughed outright, and answered in a sneering tone:

"Aha! that's your lay, is it? Well, work your ravel, old man, I am open as a book; I see your point, and I thank you!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### BRANDON'S TEST NUMBER TWO.

BURT BRANDON moved toward the door backward, keeping his face toward Knight, until he was well out of the room, when he said:

"Don't follow me, at your peril!"

"I am too glad to get rid of you, you scoundrel, to call you back!" was the defiant answer.

Once out in the street, Burt Brandon clinched his hands, beat his head, and gritted his teeth in sheer aggravation.

"Hang the rascal!" he muttered, "I was worsted in that little affair, but I'll get the string on my man yet before he is much older."

As the detective walked along he thought matters over in a pretty thorough manner.

He had struck upon certain developments that had bothered him considerably.

A word that tell from his lips betrayed the turn of his thoughts.

"By Heaven!" he muttered, "that fellow is the coolest and strongest-nerved rascal on earth, or else Renie Ruthendale lives and breathes at this moment!" And again: "I would bet ten thousand dollars that she died at that fellow's hand! I'm bothered!" was Brandon's concluding expression, as he leaped upon a downtown car.

The one point that the detective wished to establish was the connection of Bayard Knight with Renie Ruthendale's death.

He was morally sure that the girl was dead, and yet there were other proofs necessary.

It was not evidence for the public the keen officer was seeking for; it was proofs sufficient for his own mind, when he would start an extraordinary system of trailing that could but result in one way.

Upon the following day Burt Brandon was exceedingly busy.

He had determined upon a deep game, and a very ingenious one.

It is a true saying that "conscience makes cowards of us all," and detectives have always found the superstitious fears of criminals a very safe matter to play upon.

It is a fact that the most wicked and godless people are at heart the most superstitious and fearful of the appearances surrounding death.

It was through Bayard Knight's fears—his superstitious fears—that Brandon calculated to work.

He had had good evidence that the man was too cool a hand to be caught napping through ordinary tests.

A more cunning test to elicit some sort of betrayal could not be conceived than the one the detective had already tried.

The presentation of a letter in life from the victim of a murder to a murderer ought to have brought some sign, but as it proved the game was a miserable failure.

Two nights following the scenes described, Bayard Knight was walking on Broadway.

It was early in the evening, and the man was proceeding at a slow pace, when suddenly an elegantly dressed woman, with her veil lowered, touched him on the shoulder in a nervous manner, and inquired in a tremulous voice:

"Is this Mr. Anthon, the lawyer?"

"No, madam."

"Ah! heavens! sir, excuse me, but you resemble the gentleman!" and the lady sobbed, at the same time raising her veil to put her handkerchief to her eyes and disclosing a face of rare loveliness.

Bayard Knight's curiosity was at once aroused, and he said:

"Can I be of any service to you, madam?"

"Ah! sir, I do not know what to do. I am a stranger in New York, and I need an adviser whom I can trust, as my whole fortune is involved."

The word fortune was a magic one for Bayard Knight, and at once his cunning mind suggested that there might be a chance for a man of his style.

"Can I assist you in finding Mr. Anthon?"

"Oh! I have not the time to look for him. What shall I do? what shall I do?"

"Can I be of any assistance to you?"

"Ah! sir! if I could only be assured that you were a gentleman who would aid me in a most critical moment! I have no time to look for Mr. Anthon, and I am a lone woman, a stranger in New York!"

"Madam, you can rely upon my services. I am a well-known gentleman of wealth, and would most gladly aid you, if it lay in my power."

"Oh, sir, if I felt that I could really trust you; excuse me, but you are a stranger, and the circumstances are so peculiar!"

"You can trust me, madam: and now let me know your difficulty, and I will speedily tell you if I can aid you."

"A hundred thousand dollars in registered bonds have been stolen from me! I have traced the thief to New York; should I go to the police I would never recover them; it must be done by shrewd stratagem!"

"I will aid you, madam; let me know all the circumstances."

"Will you come to my hotel?"

"Where are you stopping?"

The lady named an up-town hotel.

Bayard Knight hesitated a moment.

He was too old a bird to be caught napping, and he well knew that a little game might be on the *tapis*.

Quickly he revolved matters in his mind.

He remembered that he was well armed, and resolved to take the chances.

"Madam, you can command my services. I will accompany you!"

"Had we not better stop at police headquarters, and secure the services of a detective? Now that you are to act as my adviser, it might be as well to call in police aid, and have it ready."

This last request removed the suspicions that had arisen in Knight's mind, and he was the last man to advise the calling in of a detective, when he had such a nice game in prospective for himself.

"As you choose, madam, but I think the police should not be called into a delicate matter until the last moment; you know it is said that they are great compromisers with rogues."

"And yet we may need the services of one."

"If we do, his services can be easily secured at the last moment."

"If you think we can summon one if need be, all right!"

"Shall we call a cab?"

"No, we will walk."

During the walk to the hotel the woman talked along, telling a very curious story.

Bayard Knight's curiosity was aroused.

In fact the man was in a very tight place.

He had an expensive law-suit on hand in a matter which will be duly revealed in the course of our tale, and which was a motive matter in his dealings with the beautiful Renie Ruthendale.

Already he was revolving a plan in his mind to aid his strange acquaintance in a most singular manner.

In due time they arrived at the hotel.

The lady led the way to a room in one of the upper floors.

It was a respectable house, and yet Bayard Knight's suspicions began to return; and he was on his guard.

The room into which he was shown was plainly furnished.

In one corner was a traveling trunk and other articles that might be supposed to be a part of a lady's traveling kit.

Bayard Knight was invited to seat himself at a table, and the lady removed her bonnet, disclosing a remarkably hand-some face.

She then sat down and related a long story.

Bayard Knight listened attentively, and at least half an hour had passed, when suddenly the gas went down as though it had been turned low.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the woman, springing to her feet in ill-disguised terror.

"It's nothing, madam; it will come up again!" said Bayard Knight. The man's

words proved true, and the lady resumed her seat at her story.

In a few seconds the gas commenced to lower again.

There was at one burner alight in the room, and it seemed singular that it should go down that way.

"I fear we shall be left in total darkness," said the woman, in an anxious tone.

"Oh, I guess not; it will come up again in a moment."

"What do you think it can mean?" asked the woman innocently.

"Oh, there are a dozen reasons to account for it. I have known the gas in a public building to suddenly go out."

"Mercy! I hope our light will not go out. Had you not better open the door leading into the hall?"

It was not a part of Knight's plan just at that moment to have the door opened.

He had come to believe the strange story the lady had told him and saw a chance to make a grand haul, and he was just the rascal to do it.

Little did he dream as to the identity of the person he was dealing with, or what a trial his nerves were to be put to.

The lady resumed her story, when suddenly the gas went out entirely, and the strange woman and her guest were left in total darkness.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE SHADOW ON THE WALL.

"Heavens!" screamed the woman; "the lights are out!"

"Don't be afraid, madam, I will light the gas in a moment."

The man rose to his feet, drew a match from his pocket, and sought to relight the gas, but failed.

The woman had but partly told her story, and her companion had heard just enough to make him desire to hear more.

"Hang the gas!" he muttered; "it will not light but never mind, madam, conclude your story. From what you have already related, it would appear that instant action is necessary to recover your property; we can do without the light."

Strangely enough the gas appeared to be burning well enough in the hall, and a reflection came through the fan light over the door sufficient to make it easy to discern things within the room.

The woman exhibited considerable trepidation; and pretended to be unwilling to proceed.

Knight urged her that the extinguishment of the gas was but a mere trifle, and at length she resumed her story.

Suddenly the room appeared to be illuminated by a strange, weird bluish light.

Again the woman began to tremble, and murmured:

"What is about to happen? I feel so strange."

Bayard Knight was somewhat astonished at the singular phenomenon, but his avarice overcame every other feeling, and he again urged the woman to proceed with her story.

She did so in a trembling and husky voice, when suddenly upon the wall appeared a strange and startling apparition.

A floating head with beautiful tresses of hair hanging down to where the shoulders ought to have been, moved before the eyes of the startled persons in the room.

The face of the singular apparition was not revealed at first, but after a moment it turned around, disclosing the bloody and mangled face of the ghastly relic that had been found by the two boys some weeks before at the mouth of the conduit, up the river.

Bayard Knight watched the strange thing a moment, but showed no signs of fear, nor uttered any exclamation of astonishment.

Suddenly, however, he passed round the table at which he and the woman had been seated, and catching her by the throat, hissed in her ear:

"I see your game, madam! Now, on your life, tell me who put up this shadow trick on me?"

The woman struggled to free herself from his grasp when he clapped a pistol to her forehead, and again whispered in her ear:

"Make the least outcry or resistance, and I will bury a bullet in your brain at any hazard!"

The woman did struggle, however, and managed to free herself from the clutch upon her throat sufficiently to utter a low cry.

The apparition had vanished, but the instant the woman made an outcry, two men rushed into the room.

One of them clapped a handkerchief to Bayard Knight's mouth and nostrils, as the other caught the pistol from his grasp.

Half an hour afterward, when Bayard Knight returned to consciousness, he found himself wandering through Union Square Park alone.

The man gazed about for a few moments in a dazed sort of manner, unable for a time to recall the events that had occurred.

In a few moments, however, he recovered fully, and in a low, fierce tone he exclaimed, as the recollection became more vivid:

"Aha! Burt Brandon, I know your game now! and I know just what you suspect! Well, well, I'll favor your suspicion; if I can not play against you and win with such odds in my favor, I had better sell out the job!"

The incidents through which Bayard Knight found himself wandering in the Park alone after this singular adventure were simple enough.

The incident described was a second test that the king of the detectives had subjected Knight to, in order to satisfy himself concerning the murder of Renie Ruthendale.

The whole matter had been arranged, and the lady who had figured in the affair was a skillful lady detective, who, on several occasions, had paired with Brandon on a close "pipe."

When the *dénouement* came, the two men rushed into the room, chloroformed Knight, and kept him in an unconscious condition, while they hurried him between them downstairs, into a coach and away to the park, where they left him.

Within an hour after the little adventure, Burt Brandon and the lady detective, who was known in the profession as Lady Kate, were consulting together.

"Did you have your eye on him when the floating head first appeared?" asked Brandon.

"I did."

"And he did not show any fear at all?"

"Not he; on the contrary, it was evident that, from the start, he dropped to the game."

The detective asked a number of questions, and then relapsed into a fit of deep thought. At length he remarked:

"Lady Kate, I'm bothered—in fact I'm at sea worse than I ever was in any case I ever set out to work up!"

"Where lies the mystery?"

"Well, I'll tell you: I am as dead certain that the floating head was that of Renie Ruthendale, as I ever was of anything in my life; and yet I can not get the least confirming evidence from that chap Knight."

"Could she have been murdered by any one else?"

"No; as no one had a motive but that man to murder her."

"What was his motive?"

"Well, Lady Kate, I'll tell you; women are sometimes cuter than men on certain points. Do you remember the Ruthendale poisoning case that happened about fourteen years ago?"

"I do not."

"Well, I will recall the facts. Up in one of the interior towns of this State, there used to live an old man with a young wife and one child.

"This old man, Ruthendale, was very wealthy, and had a young man living with him, a sort of *protégé*, who, he claimed, was an adopted son."

"I begin to understand what is to come," suggested Lady Kate.

"This old man died very suddenly; just after the death and funeral of his only child."

"I think I begin to remember some of the incidents."

"Possibly you do, as they were very strange and startling. The child was supposed to have fallen into the lake in the park surrounding the house, and was drowned."

"Yes, I remember; and her face was mutilated in such a manner as to be unrecognizable, and led to the suspicion that she had been murdered."

"Exactly! that is one part of the mystery! and, as you remember, shortly after the child's death the father also died very suddenly."

"I remember; and it was charged that he had been poisoned by the adopted son."

"Precisely so; and when his will was produced it was discovered that he had left his wife but a small share of his estate, and the balance of his vast property to the adopted son, who, in the will, was proclaimed to be his real son by a former wife."

"I remember all the circumstances now," remarked Lady Kate.

"Now, I have two strange facts to tell you. Bayard Knight is the man who claims to be the son of old Ruthendale. He is living here in New York under an assumed name. He has a suit pending against the estate."

"What does he want the widow's share?"

"Not exactly; a second will was produced, the one advanced by Bayard Knight being denounced as a forgery, and the suit as to the authenticity of the two wills is in progress."

"With the chances in favor of whom?" asked Lady Kate, in a peculiar tone.

"The chances would all be in favor of the widow, but for one fact."

"And that fact is what?"

"The widow is supposed to be dead; murdered, possibly, by the scamp, Bayard Knight."

"Well, in case her death is proven, what will follow?"

"There being no other heir, the chances are that in the end Bayard Knight will come in for the whole estate."

"Luck always appears to favor just such rascals," remarked Lady Kate, in a musing tone.

"Yes, but I am on that fellow's track, and by Heaven, if I live, he shall never get a dollar of that money."

"How can you prevent it?"

"By bringing him to the gallows."

"Nonsense! they can not try a man twice for his life when once acquitted."

"I do not propose to try him twice for the same offense."

"But if you will remember, he was tried for the murder of old Ruthendale, and honorably acquitted; not the least particle of evidence was ever produced against him."

"That is all right, but I have unearthed another secret."

"What secret have you unearthed?"

"The child that was found in the lake was not the child of old Ruthendale."

A strange look came over the face of Lady Kate, and had not the detective been busily engaged thinking over certain matters, he would have noticed it.

In a husky voice Lady Kate asked:

"Have you absolute proof of what you assert, Burt Brandon?"

"I have," answered the detective; and as he spoke, he observed the extraordinary change that had come over the face of his companion.

The detective was a man that could not be fooled.

In a low, meaning tone he said:

"Lady Kate, you know something about this matter; you have a strange, deep interest in what I have been telling you."

"I have."

"And yet you told me that you had forgotten all about the Ruthendale mystery."

"Well, we all have our secrets."

"Come, my dear, good friend, let me into yours."

"Oh! it is not much of a secret; but on one condition, I will tell you something."

"Name your condition."

"Under no circumstances whatever must you identify me with this affair."

"I will not."

"You remember that after Bayard Knight was acquitted of the murder, suspicion ran strong against a woman as the murderer?"

"I remember; and the woman mysteriously disappeared; and you, Lady Kate—"

"I am that woman!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### STILL SEEKING TO IDENTIFY.

BURT BRANDON did not exhibit any very strong emotion. He was used to strange *dénouements* and sudden surprises, and in a calm tone he said:

"You were nurse to the child who was supposed to have been drowned?"

"The woman who disappeared was called the child's governess, you remember; but I was really the child's nurse."

"And you possess a secret?"

"I do."

"You never believed that the body of the drowned child was the daughter of old Ruthendale?"

"I knew it was not his daughter's body."

"Why did you not proclaim your suspicions?"

"I had the most potent reasons for not doing so?"

"What were your reasons?"  
"The child's safety."

"How?"

"Had it been proved that the supposed body was not that of Renie Ruthendale, the assassin who had the child in their possession would have committed a second murder, and the last victim would have been the real child."

A most startling suspicion flashed across Burt Brandon's mind, but he kept it to himself and remarked:

"Are you certain that you could have identified the body of Renie Ruthendale?"

"Beyond any question of doubt. I knew of a mark of identification, known to no other living soul, save the doctor who attended the child's birth."

A moment's silence followed this declaration, broken at length by Lady Kate, who said:

"You have declared that you knew it was a false body buried from Alexander Ruthendale's house fourteen years ago; now tell me how you came to know that fact?"

"Not now; at some future time you shall hear the strange story; but Lady Kate, you and I have work to do, and we must act at once, but in a careful manner; our movements must be like those of an apparition, noiseless and shadowing."

"Will you not tell me your story now?"

"Not now."

"When?"

"Within forty-eight hours you shall hear all I know, and within that time you and I shall both know more than we do now; but answer me one question, was that identification mark on the body of the child Renie Ruthendale of such a nature that it would enable you to identify her after she had grown to be a woman?"

"I could identify her if she lived to be a hundred years old!"

"Could you identify her body, were she dead?"

"I could identify her body, were it cut into bits, if so I could have all the parts."

The suspicions that had crossed Burt Brandon's mind became fully confirmed, but he kept his own counsel.

Some further conversation passed between Lady Kate and our hero, and they separated.

There was a great mystery surrounding the singular woman who was known to a few members of the detective force as "Lady Kate."

By some she was called "Silent Kate," owing to the fact that when not actively interested in some immediate subject she always appeared silent and abstracted.

She had won the name of "Lady Kate," from the fact that, combined with the most beautiful person, she possessed all the qualifications of the most cultured lady.

In fact she was queen-like in her manner and bearing, and as she appeared to possess ample means, and was surrounded by a shadow of mystery, it was always believed that she had entered upon the duties of the profession in order to gratify an eccentric taste.

It had at first been whispered that she was the heroine of some strange romance, and it had been expected that some strange dénouement would be developed; but as the years rolled away and the dénouement came not, all speculation ceased, and the strange Lady Kate became an accepted fact in the profession, where, despite all the circumstances, she was regarded with the highest respect.

Burt Brandon was for a long time lost in a deep reverie after his talk with Lady Kate.

He had always suspected that she had a history, and a strange one, and he was now satisfied that he had found the key to the mystery.

Upon one occasion the detective had met Lady Kate when she was for the time being acting under an entirely different rôle than that of a lady detective.

He had never spoken of the circumstance, as at the time he supposed that it was a character assumed in a professional manner.

The circumstance, however, in view of later developments, confirmed him in a certain startling suspicion.

It was this suspicion that had prevented him from telling her the story of Renie Ruthendale. He had spoken of a murder and a mystery, but he had spoken of the victim under an assumed name.

The day following the interview recorded, Burt Brandon made an excursion to New Jersey.

He had a long interview with a certain lady,

and subsequently with the sexton of an humble country church in the village.

Both parties were enjoined to silence, and a certain plan was put in progress.

That same night the detective met the mysterious Lady Kate.

The latter importuned him to explain how he came to suspect that the child which had been buried as the daughter of the millionaire, old Mr. Ruthendale, was a spurious corpse.

"Madam," said Brandon, "you have asserted that you could identify the real heiress, dead or alive?"

"I can."

"You certainly can identify her, although now a woman grown?"

Lady Kate's face assumed a ghastly hue, and she betrayed excessive nervousness, but she answered promptly:

"I could identify her were she one hundred years old!"

"You could identify the body?"

Lady Kate stepped across the room, laid her white, trembling hand on Burt Brandon's arm, and said in a husky voice:

"You do not suspect that Renie Ruthendale was the victim of the floating-head mystery?"

"I have not said so."

"But the drift of your question would so indicate."

"Frankly, the suspicion that there is a possibility that such may be the fact, has crossed my mind."

Lady Kate fell forward, and had not Brandon caught her in his arms she would have dropped to the floor.

The detective saw that she had been stricken to insensibility.

Burt had been in a similar situation dozens of times, and knew just what to do toward restoring her.

In time he succeeded, and when Lady Kate was fully revived he whispered:

"You must be strong and brave; a terrible ordeal is before you!"

"The announcement came so suddenly, I could not withstand it; but one word more. Do you think the man Bayard Knight was at the bottom of the murder?"

"We will suspect nothing until after we have made sure of a certain point. There may yet be hope for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I meant that there is a bare possibility that you may not identify the body."

"Am I to see the body?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This very night."

"Oh, heavens! I can not stand the ordeal!"

"Show no weakness! everything depends upon the identification."

"Burt Brandon, I know you well; you could not possibly be deceived. I need not go to identify that body. You know too well what discovery awaits me."

"Madam, in our business we have to encounter too many wonderful dénouements to ever be sure of anything; and again, in this very matter I have been led to suspect that a supposed sure thing was the most uncertain matter I ever handled."

"You think there is a chance that you may be mistaken in regard to the identity of the victim of the floating-head mystery?"

"I do."

All this time Lady Kate had labored under the greatest agitation.

Usually she was a cool, reserved, and remarkably nervous woman; but during the interview described she had seemed to lose all her self-possession.

"When am I to see the ghastly object?"

"To-night."

"Why do we not start? So ghastly a job had better be ended as soon as possible."

"A carriage will be here presently to take us to the depot."

"Burt Brandon," suddenly exclaimed the mysterious Lady Kate, "I know you to be an honest man!"

"Thank you!"

"I have left a letter to be mailed in case I do not return to my lodgings at a certain time."

"Well?" ejaculated the detective in an interrogative tone.

"That letter is addressed to you; it contains certain directions in case of my death."

"Why do you take such precautions against your death? Do you imagine you are in peril?"

"No; but I may be dead before morning."

"I do not understand you."

"You can guess."

"I can not."

"I will tell you: If I succeed in identifying the body to-night, I shall be returned with it to the grave it is taken from."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SERIES OF THRILLING ADVENTURES.

"PROMISE me to do nothing rash?"

"I am not set upon doing anything rash; I have calmly thought matters over and determined upon my course after the calmest reflection!"

A suspicion passed through Brandon's mind, and he said:

"Do not fulfill your determination until your identification is established beyond any question."

"There can be no mistake in my identification; if it is the body of Renie, I shall know it; there is no possibility of a failure!"

At that moment a carriage rattled in front of Burt Brandon's office.

"Come, we will go," he said.

Lady Kate had to a certain extent recovered her usual firmness, and followed the detective down to the carriage.

A short ride and they were at the depot.

Both were in disguise.

It had been necessary to take certain long chances, and risk the appearance of a criminal proceeding in their undertaking in order to avoid the sensational notoriety of another course.

They were soon whirled to the station, where the grave-yard was situated in which the ghastly inspection was to take place.

Burt Brandon had just alighted from the train.

It was near midnight, when suddenly he caught a glimpse of a face that caused him to involuntarily utter an exclamation of astonishment.

The station light, with its bright reflector, shot a bright ray of light along the station platform, and just for an instant, gleaming under that ray of light, he had seen a head of hair, a perfect facsimile of that upon the floating head.

It appeared to pass across the ray of light and disappear.

Burt was not a superstitious man, and yet for the instant his blood ran cold.

"Stand here a moment," he said to Lady Kate, and ran along the platform in the direction in which he had momentarily seen the startling apparition.

He looked around in every direction, but saw nothing.

The train moved on and Burt met the station-master; of the latter he asked:

"Did you see a lady here at the station?"

"There has been no lady here to-night except the one standing below there who just got off the train with a gentleman."

"You saw no young lady with bright curls streaming down upon her shoulders?"

"I did not."

Burt returned to his companion who asked:

"What started you off so suddenly?"

"Well, I hardly dare tell you; my imagination has played me a strange trick, or else the grave has given forth its occupant."

"What do you mean?"

"As I live I saw the form of the owner of the floating head, or my imagination is strangely overheated and has played me a most singular trick!"

At this moment a lady crossed the streak of light and came toward them.

"That explains it!" exclaimed Burt, and he went to meet the new-comer.

"Ah! I have had such a fright!" exclaimed the lady, breathlessly.

"Indeed I have it!" answered the detective.

"Indeed! what did you see?"

"Well, a moment ago I saw you and your head of hair, which bears such a wondrous resemblance to another, that for the moment I thought the grave had given up its dead!"

The woman's face became ghastly as she murmured:

"Ah heavens! then you saw it too!"

As our readers have surmised, the lady was the veiled woman whom our hero had met in the room just after the discovery of the floating head, and who had claimed to be a sister of the murdered girl.

When the woman gave utterance to the re-

mark, "Then you have seen it, too!" Brandon was impelled to ask anxiously:

"Were you not here a moment ago?"

"I have just this second arrived."

"Were you not here before the train went on?"

"I was not."

"Then the mystery remains unsolved!" said Burt.

"Yes, it is a mystery; this night I saw my sister's ghost!"

"Your sister's ghost?"

"As sure as I live."

"How long ago?"

"But a few moments ago."

"Where?"

"As I came along the road toward the depot I met it over there by the church."

"Your imagination has played you a trick."

"On my soul, no! I saw it as plainly as I see you at this moment."

"Will you accompany us to the church?"

"I will."

The church was but a short step from the depot.

The party passed along through the darkness, and had proceeded but a short distance, when a dark figure was seen in advance of them.

The woman caught Burt by the arm, and whispered in a husky voice:

"There it is!"

"What?"

"My sister's ghost."

"You remain here, and I will go ahead and see what this thing means."

The two women stood together crouching in the darkness, close under a tree that grew beside the road, while the detective advanced toward the dark figure standing in front of the church.

As he advanced he saw the figure move.

It passed through the gate leading into the church-yard, and ran along close under the shadow of the church.

The detective started upon a run, and soon gained upon the figure, when he called to it to stop.

The figure paid no attention to his call, and Brandon continued the chase.

The figure passed beyond the church, and down in the shadow among the trees, at the lower end of the lonely church-yard.

Suddenly it disappeared.

The detective was amazed.

His present experience was different from any he had ever before encountered.

He struck a light, lighted his masked lantern, and commenced a most thorough search.

At length he came to a monument, standing white and ghost-like, and at the same moment he discovered a dark object crouching behind it.

He closed in upon the object, when a voice, tremulous and sweet, asked:

"In mercy's name, why do you pursue me?"

"In mercy's name," answered the detective, as he drew nearer, "what are you doing in this place at such an hour?"

"I am doing no harm."

The detective advanced and flashed his light upon a pale, beautiful face upturned toward him, and around that fair face clutched ringlets the same as clustered around the head that was found floating in the river.

A cold chill trembled around the brave man's heart.

A suspicion of the truth flashed across his mind.

He was gazing upon the face of Aletta Gregory, the living woman who was supposed to have been buried in that very church-yard.

"Your name is Aletta Gregory?" said the officer.

"What matters it to you what my name is?" answered the crouching girl.

Little did that poor trembling girl imagine how great a difference it did make to Burt Brandon.

If Aletta Gregory were living, one fact was settled beyond all possible chance to the contrary—poor Renie Ruthendale was the victim of the river murder.

"You must come with me!" said Brandon.

"Why must I go with you? I have committed no crime."

"Your sister, Mrs. Bonnel, awaits you outside the church-yard."

"I do not wish to see my sister."

"You must come with me!"

"I will not!"

"Why have you come here?"

"I can not tell."

"You must have had some reason."

"Go away and let me alone!"

An idea suggested itself to our hero's mind. He had met with so many strange adventures that he was at all times prepared for any sort of curious development.

Brandon's keen eyes scanned the crouching girl's face, and he observed a strange, wild look, as though some fearful determination had become fixed in her mind.

"You must come with me from this awful place!" he said, in a firm, decided tone.

The girl rose to her feet as though to dash away.

The detective reached forward to seize her, when suddenly from the folds of her dress she drew a pistol and presented it at his face.

A man less used to facing cocked revolvers would have recoiled, but quick as a flash, Brandon seized the weapon and wrenched it from her grasp, and the next moment he caught her firmly in his arms.

"Ahl mercy! mercy!" pleaded the struggling girl.

At that moment a most singular interruption occurred.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A SCENE IN A CHURCH CRYPT.

A shrill scream rang out upon the night air, and the girl, who had been wrestling to free herself from the detective, ceased her struggles.

"Oh, mercy!" she murmured, "that voice!"

At that moment Mrs. Bonnel, pale and trembling, came forward, and with straining eyes gazed at the girl held in Brandon's grasp.

"Hold you flesh and blood?" she gasped, addressing the detective.

"I do."

"Heavens! it's my sister!"

"So I am assured."

"The body! the headless body in yonder vault!" murmured Mrs. Bonnel, as she rushed forward and grasped her sister in her arms, and showered kisses upon her.

A moment and the violence of her caresses abated, when Brandon said:

"The mystery of the headless trunk remains."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Bonnel, and she related to her sister the story of the ghastly tragedy, and told how she had claimed the body, and mourned her sister as dead.

The sister's story explained how a real tragedy had been averted.

It was a sad story told by Aletta Gregory. Like many a poor girl before her, she had trusted in man's honor, and had been deceived. She had read in the papers the account of the floating head, and how the ghastly body had been identified by her sister.

As time passed on she felt a desire to visit her sister and tell her the truth; but at length a great sorrow had come upon her. Her mind, from dwelling upon the body that had been buried as her own, turned, and at the time she was discovered by Brandon, she had visited the church-yard, determined to take her own life.

A sister's loving voice and forgiving love turned her from her fell purpose, and soothed her until her mind was restored.

The party walked through the church-yard toward the entrance, where Lady Kate was standing.

Before joining the latter Brandon said, addressing Mrs. Bonnel:

"I hope you will not disturb the headless dead?"

"No, no."

"Nor let it be known beyond the circle of your immediate acquaintance, for the present, that your sister has been found alive?"

Mrs. Bonnel promised, and after a few more words led her rescued sister away.

A fearful duty now remained to the detective.

The finding of the living Aletta Gregory had settled the identity of the headless remains beyond all question.

It seemed a night fraught with tragedy.

Brandon had good reason to suspect that Lady Kate would identify the remains, and what he feared was that the mysterious woman would end her own life over the ghastly corpse.

He approached Lady Kate, and in a low, excited voice said:

"We will finish our errand and be gone!"

"One moment," said Lady Kate; "the supposed dead has been found alive!"

"Yes."

"And that settle the matter concerning the body within there?"

"I am afraid that the matter is already virtually settled."

"Brandon, you will remember certain instructions you received from me?"

"My dear madam, you can not go through with this affair unless you make me a sacred promise."

"What right have you to dictate to me?"

"The right of humanity, and you must on your sacred honor swear to do yourself no harm this night should certain discoveries be made."

"I shall make no promises."

"Then you must return with me to New York without entering that chapel."

"I will take no oaths, and I will not return to New York until I have entered that chapel."

"You know me, Lady Kate; I am not a man who threatens and fails to execute."

Lady Kate appeared to appreciate that Brandon meant all he said, and after a few moments' thought, she said:

"I will swear!"

Beside the main church building stood a small chapel.

Toward the latter building Brandon and Lady Kate walked.

A dim light gleamed through the rear windows, and as they stepped upon the porch the detective said:

"Remember your oath!"

"I will!" was the response, and Lady Kate passed into the building.

At the far end of the building stood a litter, and upon the litter rested a coffin.

Lady Kate recled toward the coffin, and upon reaching the platform seized the lamp left for her use, and advanced beside it.

A horrid sight met her gaze.

The rays from her lamp fell upon the already blackened form of the headless corpse.

Here for a few moments we leave her standing beside the silent dead.

Without, upon the porch, stood Brandon, the detective.

Rigid and immovable as a statue, with folded arms, he waited.

His ears were strained, as he anticipated each instant to hear a cry of anguish, and he was prepared to leap through the door and hasten to the rescue.

At least ten minutes passed, and no sound came from within, and the officer muttered, in an apprehensive tone:

"Can it be possible that she has disregarded her oath?"

His hand was upon the knob of the door, when he heard a slight noise within.

He bent forward and listened.

He was not deceived.

He heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

He was right! Lady Kate had passed the fearful ordeal, and was on the way to rejoin him.

Brandon's heart trembled, and as the woman stepped forth, he exclaimed:

"You have acted nobly!"

"What a fearful sight! Ah, Heaven! I know not how I gazed upon it and lived!"

"Tis poor Renie, though?" said the detective, in a matter-of-fact sort of way.

"No; it is not the body of Renie Ruthendale!"

"Not the body of Renie Ruthendale?" at most shouted the detective.

"It is not her body!"

"You are sure?"

"I am sure; as sure as positive facts can make a certainty."

"Then Renie lives!" exclaimed Brandon as a feeling of gladness swept over him.

"If that loathsome object within there is the only obstacle in the way of her being alive, she lives!"

"Come, let us go, Lady Kate; we have work before us. If Renie lives, she is in the power of that wretched Bayard Knight!"

"Aha! I see it all now. You suspected that man of murdering Renie?"

"I did."

"And you say Renie is in his power?"

"I am certain of it."

"Then truly we have work to do, and our play is against one of the most desperate men on earth!"

"You will find me a match for that man and if Renie lives she is safe at least for a season."

"That man may murder her at any moment."

"He will not dare to harm a hair of her head, now that he knows that I suspect him!"

having murdered her; but a more terrible fate may await her than even death itself."

It was far into the morning when the man and lady detective started from the church-yard toward the depot.

It will be sufficient to explain to our readers that Brandon had arranged with the church sexton for the exhuming of the headless body, and for all preparations, so that Lady Kate could make the required examination.

The detective had secured sufficient facts to discern, to a certain extent, the plans of the man Bayard Knight.

He knew that he must act surely and quickly, and find Renie, now that he was satisfied that she was still living.

Arrived at the depot, the detective learned that there was a freight train through for the city that stopped at a station two miles below.

It was too late to secure a team, and Lady Kate proposed that they should walk to the other station, and save the three or four hours in time.

Together they proceeded along the country road, and were crossing a bridge, when suddenly the sharp report of a pistol rang out upon the night-air, and a pistol-ball glanced by Brandon's head.

"Down, madam!" he exclaimed, and as the woman obeyed, he also dropped flat upon the floor of the bridge.

He was not a moment too soon, as a second and third shot was seen, and two more bullets came whistling over them.

Brandon had seen the flashes, and in a trice let drive two or three answering shots.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE PISTOL SHOTS ON THE BRIDGE.

The fact became assured that he and his companion had been dogged.

But one man had a purpose or motive in "piping" his movements.

The moment the detective fired the answering shots, the assassins ceased firing.

The detective cautiously crept toward the place whence the shots had come, but did not see any signs of the would-be murderers.

After waiting a reasonable time he rose to his feet, and walking forward, pistol in hand, made a close examination, but his assailants had made themselves scarce.

Returning to where Lady Kate was, he said: "We will proceed; the rascals have been frightened off."

Without further accident they reached the depot.

Fortunately, they were just in time for the train, and soon reached the city.

The next day man, dressed as a sailor, might have been seen hanging around the house where Bayard Knight lived.

Hours passed, and yet the sailor every once in a while sauntered past the house.

At length Knight came forth, and started down the street.

The sailor was at his heels, but kept at a safe distance, and concealed from view.

Bayard Knight walked along for several blocks, and then entered a prominent corner drinking place.

A reasonable time passed, and the sailor followed into the same place.

Knight was standing at the bar, engaged in conversation with a rough-looking man.

As the sailor entered, the stranger was just in the act of shoving a roll of bills in his vest pocket.

A strange smile played over the sailor's face as he went to the bar, called for a cigar, and turned to go out on the street.

A few moments passed, and Bayard Knight came from the saloon and sauntered back toward his home.

The sailor did not attempt to follow him, but hung around the saloon until he saw the rough-looking man, who had been stowing the money in his vest pocket, come forth.

The sailor followed the latter, who walked leisurely down the street to a car route.

The man hailed a car and boarded it, and was followed by the sailor.

At the City Hall the man alighted, and took his course through Frankfort Street toward a section of the city where respectable men seldom go, except during the hours of broad daylight.

The man soon stopped in front of a house having a very dirty and dilapidated appearance.

For the first time he gave a sign.

The sign that the sailor had been waiting for. He cautiously looked up and down the street, and then entered the house.

"Ah!" muttered the sailor; "my covey, you feller being followed, eh? Well, we shall see," and the speaker sauntered down past the house the man had entered.

An examination revealed the fact that it was a sailor boarding-house, and on the lowest floor was located a filthy-looking bar-room.

Into the latter place the sailor entered, and going to the bar, called for a drink.

A woman—a rough-looking creature—was in attendance at the bar, and passed over a bottle containing the vile liquid.

A few casual words passed, and the sailor drew a pipe from his pocket, filled it with tobacco, lighted the latter, and commenced to smoke.

The woman hung around for a few moments, and then entered a rear room, leaving the customer alone in the bar.

A mean looking mirror hung against the wall, in the frame of which was stuck a number of business cards.

The sailor rose from his seat, crossed over to the mirror, and pretended to be admiring his face, while at the same time he managed to shove a carte de visite, representing a very handsome young woman, in the looking-glass frame along with the business cards.

Returning to his seat, he took up a daily paper and pretended to be reading.

A few moments passed, and a number of sailors came staggering into the bar-room.

Seeing the disguised detective, one of them called out:

"Come, mate, take a smile with us."

Brandon was waiting for just such a chance in order to throw off suspicion from his movements, and he joined the men at the bar.

Over an hour passed.

The men drank and threw dice, and finally proposed a game of cards.

The detective had acted his part well, as none of the men "dropped" to the fact that he was aught else but a sailor.

The men were seated at a little table.

Our hero had been invited to join in the game, and did so.

While the game was in progress, the party standing around watching the play was augmented by a man who evidently had come from upstairs.

One glance was enough for the detective.

The new-comer was the man who had received money from Bayard Knight.

The man stood for some time watching the game, but at length began to wander round the room in a listless manner, gazing at the various pictures that ornamented the walls.

The detective pretended to be intently interested in the game, but his eyes were constantly on the man he was "piping."

The latter at length stopped in front of the mirror where Brandon had placed the carte de visite.

Suddenly the fellow uttered an exclamation of surprise, and caught the photograph in his hand and examined it in a critical manner, all the time uttering suppressed exclamations of amazement.

A pleased look shot over Brandon's face, and he made a proposition to withdraw from the game of cards.

He had been losing right along purposely, and as the sailors who were playing with him had what is termed a soft thing, they objected to his leaving.

The detective insisted, and as the men were full of liquor, angry words followed.

One of the men drew a sheath-knife from his belt, and burying it, quivering, in the table, exclaimed fiercely:

"Look here, pard, you just keep your seat, and go on with the game, or you will get hurt!"

Brandon quickly drew a pistol from his pocket, clapped it against the sailor's cheek, and said:

"Look here, mate, hide your knife, or by Heaven I'll make a hole through your head large enough to haul a gaff rope through you!"

The sailor saw that he had met a square match, burst into a boisterous laugh, raised his knife, offered to shake hands, and all was over. Brandon offered to treat the crowd, and peace prevailed.

All this time the man had stood gazing in a dazed sort of way at the photograph.

The detective came along behind him, and looked over his shoulder, and said:

"Hello, pard, taking a squint at the face of your sweetheart?"

The man clapped the photograph in his pocket, and answered, in an angry manner:

"Mind your own business, mister."

"Mind there, mate, that's just what I'm doing."

"What are you asking me saucy questions for if you are minding your own business?"

"One question is as good as another. What are you shoving that picture in your pocket for?"

"It's mine."

"Hold on, mate, you just took that picture from the mirror, there."

"That's my business."

"Easy, my man; what right had you to shove the thing in your pocket?"

"Is the picture yours?"

"Well, yes; I reckon it is."

"Where did you get it from?"

"Well, now, wouldn't it be as well for you to take a little of your own sauce, and mind your own business?"

"I'll take that back, my friend."

"All right, just hand the picture back and you and I are square."

"You can't have that picture back."

"I can't eh?"

"No."

"Then you will tell me by what right you keep it from me."

"I'll buy it from you."

"Not much."

The man started to walk away, when Brandon caught hold of him with a strong hand, and said:

"Hold on, mate, I tell you you have got something that belongs to me."

"I found it in the rack there."

"No odds. I tell you it's mine; I put it in the rack."

"Why did you put it there if you value it so highly?"

"That's my business."

"Do you know the original?"

"I reckon I do, or I would not have the picture."

The man hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Come to my room; I want to talk with you."

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### A STARTLING INTERVIEW.

BRANDON was nothing loath to follow the man to his room. In fact, the plan suited the detective exactly.

The man led the way upstairs into a small bedroom, locked the door behind him after both had entered, and pointed for the detective to take a seat on a trunk.

Brandon took the seat, when the man drew the photograph from his pocket, and, holding up, asked:

"Did you put that picture in the mirror?"

"I did."

"You say that the original is alive?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"What is that of your business?"

"See here, my man, I'll give you a ten-dollar note to tell me where I can find the original of that picture."

"You're very kind, but somehow it strikes me you're too anxious. I don't think I'll tell you."

"Don't attempt to trifle with me," said the man, and a look came over his face that showed him to be a determined and desperate customer.

"I reckon I'm not fooling. I know of no law that would make me answer your questions."

"I know a law."

"Well, you had better go to law, then; you can get no answer out of me by trying to scare a fellow."

The man drew a cocked revolver from his coat-pocket, and, bringing it to a level with Brandon's head, said:

"There's a little law here will serve my purpose. Open your mouth, or I'll silence your tongue forever!"

"Murder a man in open day!" exclaimed the detective, recoiling, and pretending to be fearfully frightened.

"I care nothing about open day or dark night! I am a man who can never be balked when I start for a thing."

"But you will be hung if you murder me!" exclaimed Brandon, in a tone as though he was frightened half out of his wits.

"I'll take all chances on hanging."  
"I want to be out of this room."  
"You can't go out until you have answered my questions."  
"What question do you want me to answer?" asked the detective, in a trembling voice.  
"I want to know where I can find the original of that picture."  
"I can't tell you."  
"You mean you will not tell me?"

"I did know where the girl was; I do not know where she is now."  
"Will you swear you do not know?"  
"See here, boss, let's travel on the square. You just tell me why you are so anxious to find out about that girl."  
"She is my daughter."

A strange light broke in upon Brandon's mind. He had "piped" down to a fine point, and had struck a most valuable trail.

"Your daughter!" he exclaimed, in an astonished tone.  
"Yes, my daughter."  
"Well, it's a strange father does not know where to find his own daughter!"  
"If you don't come down to business, my man, I'll let a ball find its way into your head!"  
"Why are you so rampageous 'gainst me? I don't know anything about your daughter."  
"Where did you get that photograph?"  
"A young lady gave it to me."  
"What young lady?"  
"The young lady it was taken for, of course."  
"When did you see that young lady last?"  
"So she is your daughter, eh?"  
"That is the picture of my daughter."  
"She don't look much like her daddy, does she?"

The man showed signs of great rage, and a murderous light gleamed in his eyes.

The detective did not know what peril he was really in just at that moment.

The father, however, appeared to change his mind; and, in a humble and pathetic tone, he said:

"Listen, my man. I am a poor man, but I am not the first poor man who has had a handsome daughter."

"But your child don't resemble you one bit."

"Never mind. When that child was about nine years old she was stolen from me; and I, a poor, heart broken man, have been searching for her high and low the world over."

"And she was really your own child?"

"She is really my own child."

"I do not believe it!"

The man's manner changed again; and, advancing a step nearer the detective, he said:

"By Heaven, I'll kill you!"

The detective all along had acted in a simple manner, and as though he was greatly frightened.

Suddenly, however, his whole manner changed, and, in a tone as fierce as the man who was intimidating him, he said:

"Come, mister, put down that pistol; it might go off!"

The man noticed the sudden change in the pretended sailor's manner, and asked, in astonishment:

"Who are you?"  
"Don't you remember me?"  
"No."

"Well, then I have the advantage of you."  
"The advantage of me?"

"Yes."

The man turned pale, and a fit of trembling seized him as he asked:

"Who am I?"

"Well, it don't make much difference, I am not bound to tell."

The man shoved his pistol forward, when the detective leaped to his feet, seized the fellow's wrist, and turned the weapon aside as it exploded.

Whether the pistol had gone off through accident or whether the fellow had intended to murder him, Brandon did not know, but it was a narrow escape at best.

"Leon Leonardi, do not try that again, or you are a dead man!"

At the mention of the name "Leon Leonardi," the man's face became ghastly, and, in a husky voice, he exclaimed:

"S'death, man! who are you?"  
"It don't make any difference who I am. But now, tell me what your business was with Bayard Knight to-day."

"I had no business with a man named Bayard Knight. I do not know any such man."

"It will not do for you to lie to me, Leon: I've got you down fine. Bayard Knight paid you money to-day."

"No, sir—on my oath, no, sir."  
"It won't do. Now, listen to me. You know where that girl is at this moment."  
"On my honor, I do not."  
"On the honor of a child-stealer—a kidnapper, eh?" said the detective, in a significant tone.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the man, "has that come to me at last?"

"Yes, and if you do not make a clean breast of all you know, you'll hang!"

"They won't hang men for kidnapping."

"You'll hang for something else."

"What?"

"Murder."

The man dropped to the floor on his knees, and protested in the most earnest manner that he had never committed a murder.

"If you do not produce that girl, you will hang for murder."

"I do not know where the girl is; if I did I could make Bayard Knight pay me thousands of dollars."

"Ah! you do know such a man as Bayard Knight?"

"The game is up; it's no use for me to try the cover game. I do know a man who has assumed the name of Bayard Knight."

"And he has assumed another name."

"What other name?"

"Ruthendale."

"You have got things down fine. Who are you?"

The detective was about to answer, when a most thrilling and startling incident occurred.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A FRESH CLEW.

LEON LEONARDI had just uttered the words recorded at the close of the previous chapter when a great noise was heard overhead, and men's voices mingled with cries of terror and profanity.

Leonardi turned pale as he listened, but Brandon moved toward the door.

He found it locked, and, turning to his companion, said:

"Give me the key, quick!"

"Be careful what you do!"

"What do you mean?"

"You know not what you may encounter."

"I care not; I must enter this room."

"Wait a moment, at all events."

"Not a second; give me the key."

"You will have it?"

"Yes, at once!"

Leonardi handed over the key, and at the same time a wild cry rang through the house.

Brandon opened the door and stepped out into the hall.

As he did so, the form of a man came headlong down the stairs leading from the upper story.

And as the detective leaped to his side, he murmured:

"My share! my share!"

Brandon had just time to hear these words when an infuriated man came rushing down the stairs.

On seeing the detective, he hesitated an instant, and then shouted:

"Out of my way or down you go!"

As he spoke, he sprang forward.

Brandon seized hold of him and held him back, when the man exclaimed, fiercely:

"Let me go!"

"Take it easy, mate; you're mad! Take a squint at this, and it will cool you off a bit."

The detective held a pistol at the man's cheek.

A desperate struggle followed, and in the end Brandon was compelled to beat the ruffian into insensibility.

The row had brought a number of excited beholders to the spot, but, as such scenes were common in that house, no alarm was given, and the police were not summoned.

The detective still played the rôle of sailor, and made it appear that he had only interfered to save a man's life.

The fellow who had been thrown down the stairs was pretty badly cut, but, as the detective discovered, after a rapid examination, not dangerously.

The last ruffian and would-be assassin was carried away by some friends, while our hero waited to attend to the other man.

It appeared that the detective had slipped the photograph into his vest-pocket, and the face showed.

As he raised the man to assist him to a bed while a physician was being sent for, the fellow's eyes fell upon the picture.

An exclamation fell from his lips, while a strange look of astonishment shadowed across his face.

Brandon noticed the change in the man's countenance, and also the direction of his eyes; and, glancing down, saw what had occasioned it.

A man like Brandon thinks quickly, and puts little glimpses of clews together, in the formation of a chain of evidence, in a flash.

He did on this occasion.

He remembered the man's murmured words as he fell, and, coupling that with the recognition of the picture, a strange suspicion flashed over his mind.

He said nothing, however, but assisted in placing the poor fellow on a bed, and in the meantime a doctor had arrived—or, at least, a drunken sort of chap, who claimed to be a physician.

Brandon could bide his time, and during the whole excitement he had not lost sight of Leonardi, and at once returned to his room.

The man had remarked, just as the excitement arose, that Brandon had things down fine.

The detective took up the vein of conversation just where it had been broken off.

The whole aspect of affairs had changed.

The fellow Leonardi had been the master spirit during the early part of the interview; but afterward the detective became the captain of the quarters, and held his companion a cowed and humble man.

"See here, my man," said Brandon. "You admit that Bayard Knight paid you money; now, then, tell me for what purpose that money was paid."

"Tell me first who you are."

"Well, I'm the devil!"

"That's just what I was thinking. I never saw you before, and yet you've got me and Bayard Knight down fine."

"And if you do not come right out with your story, I'll have you in jail!"

"I tumble!" exclaimed the man, as a look of intelligence flashed over his face. "You're a cop—a detective?"

"Well, have it any way you like; but answer my question, or you will find yourself in trouble."

"Well, boss, I ain't got no question to answer."

"You want me to assist your memory?"

"Maybe so."

"Well, you were employed years ago to steal a child."

"It's false!"

"You did steal the child; and, in order to cover your tracks, you murdered another one, and threw it into the Park mere, with the face so disfigured that it could not be recognized."

"You are telling what is false!"

"You were an actor with a circus, and you took the child to teach it your trade."

"False! false!"

"Bayard Knight afterward came and claimed the child, and since then you have been blackmailing him, promising all the time to squeal unless your demands were satisfied."

"The latter part of what you say may be true, but I had nothing to do with stealing the child."

"I see you are determined to be hanged."

"If I am hanged for what you charge, I will die an innocent man."

"Now listen to me, Leonardi. How much money do you receive from Knight?"

"You know so much, you ought to know the amount he pays me for my silence."

"It will pay you to inform me."

"How?"

"Well, I'll tell you, my man. I'm on the track of that girl. You can assist me. Come over to my side—or, rather her side—and you shall receive more money than Knight pays you."

"He don't pay me much."

"Tell me about how much."

"Maybe he's let me have about three thousand altogether since I turned the gal over to him, and I could have made ten times that out of her if I had kept her in the business."

"You are telling me the truth?"

"Yes!"

"Well, if you will assist me to recover that

girl, you shall have five thousand dollars down."

"I'm your man!"

"You shall receive five hundred if you will tell me the true story as to how the girl came into your possession."

"I'll do it."

"Mind you, it will be no use to try a trumped-up story on me. I've got you down fine, and enough of the true story to know when you get to romancing."

"I've no purpose in romancing. Knight hasn't acted on the square with me, and I would be glad to give him a trip up."

"Well, tell your story."

"The gal was brought to me by a man called Bruno."

"How did he come to have her in his possession?"

"I can not tell you; but I shouldn't be surprised if he was guilty of what you just accused me."

"Would you know this Bruno if you saw him again?"

"Like a book!"

"How old a man was he?"

"About thirty at that time, I should say."

"What countryman?"

"A Spaniard or a gypsy."

"He brought you the child. What clothing did she have on?"

"Old clothing."

"Then you got no little article that would serve, in certain events, to identify her?"

"Yes, I did."

"What?"

"A locket."

"How did you get it?"

"I bought it from Bruno."

"You have it yet?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

The man put his hand in his pocket, drew forth an old pocket-book, and from its greasy depths extracted a handsome jeweled locket.

Brandon opened the locket, and uttered a cry of astonishment; at the same time a look of great satisfaction came over his face.

"I see you are telling me a true story."

"I am; you are not the kind of chap for me to deal double with."

"You will find it the best job in your life. And now, mark me. There are five hundred dollars. You must run Knight for more money, and stand true and firm, and you will be a rich man. I want you to appoint a meeting with Knight at some place where I can overhear the conversation."

"I'm in your hands, boss. I'll do just as you say."

An arrangement was completed for an interview between Knight and Leonardi, when the detective left him, and paid a visit to the room where the man lay whose life he had saved.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A VILLAIN IN A TRAP.

The man was sick and feverish, and not in a condition for questioning, so Brandon determined to call and see him on the following day.

Upon the following morning the detective was on hand.

He found the wounded man so far recovered as to be out of bed.

Entering the room, the officer said:

"You had a narrow squeeze of it yesterday, Bruno."

"Who are you?" growled the man.

"That's a nice way to receive a fellow who saved your life, mate."

The detective was in the same disguise as on the previous day.

"Ah! you're the chap that saved me from being 'double banked'?"

"I'm the man."

"Well, I'm much obliged to yer; but if I hadn't been taken unawares, Gimpy wouldn't have got the better of me the way he did."

"You're coming around all right, though, Bruno."

"See here, what in thunder do you call me Bruno for? My name's Blakie."

"Oh! the other chap in the man named Bruno?"

"No, it ain't; we call him Gimpy. But it kinder strikes me that the third chap in the job was called Bruno."

The detective smiled grimly, as he said:

"What job?"

"Well, the little job that led to the racket yesterday."

"Tell us about that job, mate."

"You're a green un."

"Not much."

"Yes yer be, to suppose I'd tell you about any little racket I might be in!" and the fellow laughed in an amused manner.

"You had better tel me about it."

"See here, nobby, I don't like your style. I might be under a little obligation to yer, but change yer slack or get out of here!"

"I've got something to show you, Blakie."

"The man's face changed at once, and his voice became husky as he said:

"That ere pictur, eh?"

"Well, yea."

"See here. You're got up well, but I've tumbled. My mouth's shut; mum's my doctrine, boss."

"Oh, I think you'll open when you find out how fine I've got things down on you."

"You can't work me!"

"We'll see. In the first place, Gimpy cheated you out of your rake, and that's what led to the racket yesterday."

The man's eyes opened wide as he answered.

"You've got that good!"

"I've more just as good. You were in with Gimpy and Bruno to kidnap the gal."

"Not by a long sight!"

"Easy, Blakie. I've piped you close, and you've got first chance to blow."

"I ain't no squealer!"

"Then you don't want to go to the hospital?"

"Not much!"

"We'll ride you over there if you don't open out!"

"Well, see here—all I did was to drive the coach."

"I know that; but you saw enough to put me on a dead trail."

"But I was beat out of my rake."

"Oh, that's your racket?"

"Just a little."

"I'll see you if you come out square."

"How much?"

"A hundred."

"And clear of all 'pulls'?"

"Clear of all 'pulls.'"

"Well, we did smuggle the gal."

The detective held up the *carte de visite*.

"Yes, that was the gal."

"What became of her?"

"I can't tell yer, but I've my notion."

"What is your notion?"

"They made a 'stiff' of her."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, it's only a suspicion, but on good grounds."

"Open out clean, Blakie."

"Well, yer know, I saw a pictur of that 'ere floating head."

"Well?"

"It kind o' struck me it might be the gal we smuggled."

"Tell me the whole story."

"Well, one night I was let into the game by Gimpy. He said there were a gal to ride off, and I were told to have a carriage at a certain street. I got into the game enough to know that a note had been sent to the gal, that were to bring her to a certain point, where Gimpy and the other chap were to light on to her, and I were to stand by with the carriage."

"And the programme was carried out?"

"Just like a mice!"

"What was the girl taken to?"

"A house up town."

"Where?"

"I can't tell exactly."

Brandon mentioned the location of Bayard Knight's house.

"I guess that were the place."

Thus far Brandon had been wonderfully successful.

He had tracked down Leonardi, and had established an important link. He had run down Blakie, and was satisfied that he had traced the girl to Knight's home.

His next "lay" was to catch Gimpy and Bruno.

The latter was the man he most wanted, as the fellow could furnish the only important link of the great chain of evidence necessary.

Brandon was not only on the "pipe" to recover Renie Ruthenda'e, but he was gathering evidence to defeat a great crime and do an act of justice involving a million of money.

"Describe the chap Bruno."

Blakie furnished the required description.

"Where does he hang out?"

"Well, boss, I can't tell yer exactly; but I kin tell yer the 'jig' he's workin'."

"What's his lay?"

"He's a blackmailer."

"How is he pushing it?"

"Well, he's got a gal, and comes the indecent assault, racket, and I've heard he's pickin' up lots o' stamps at it."

Brandon well knew the game.

It was a new racket on the part of rogues, and had been pretty well worked by some of them, and had proved very successful; and detectives had been baffled, owing to the fact that the victims wouldn't give the thing away, for fear of compromising themselves by an unenviable notoriety.

That same night the detective was on hand for Leonardi's interview with Bayard Knight.

The fellow was well posted for the rôle he was to assume.

About ten o'clock our hero entered a well-known public hotel, where private rooms were to be had.

He passed to one of these rooms, and patiently waited.

Half an hour passed, and he became satisfied that two men were entering the adjoining room.

Brandon had things fixed, and, mounting a chair, he peeped through a little hole that enabled him to see and hear what was going on.

The two men who had entered the room were Knight and the fellow Leonardi.

Knight was the first to speak, and his tones were fierce and angry.

"Mind you, my man, I am getting tired of your importunities, and this thing has got to come to an end."

"You can bring it to an end mighty quick."

"Yes, but I am not ending things your way."

"We can end it another way!"

"How?"

"Well, the gal's mother is alive yet, and I know just where to find her."

Bayard Knight did not start or show any surprise or excitement, but proved how deep and self-possessed and cunning a villain he was.

In a matter-of-fact sort of way, he answered:

"That's no news; I knew the girl's mother was alive."

"Well, I can end the matter through her."

"How?"

"By telling her all I know."

"You're a fool!"

"Not much!"

"Yes, you are, to talk that way. I drop you, you can't get another cent out of me."

"I can out of her, though."

"There is nothing you can tell her she don't already know."

"She don't know it was her child that was found in the lake."

"She does."

"She don't know her child yet lives."

"Not you, either."

"Yes, I do."

"Then you want to break with me?"

"If I do, I'll go in with Bruno."

Bayard Knight at last made a break.

This last thrust went right home. His wicked eyes burned with a murderous light.

He was seated in such a way that Brandon, from his lookout, could watch every play of his countenance.

The bad looks lasted only for an instant, when a soft expression illuminated his eyes, and, in a mild voice, he said:

"You and I must not quarrel, Leonardi!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A START ON A DANGEROUS TRAIL

BRANDON knew that his accomplice was in greater danger than when the fellow's glance spoke open murder.

As events proved, it was lucky for Leonardi, that keener eyes were watching than his own, and that a cooler brain was on guard for his protection.

"There will be no advantage in your quarreling with me, Leonardi," said Knight.

"I do not wish to quarrel, unless you force it."

"Here, man, listen. In a few days I will have plenty of money, and you can have two hundred and fifty."

"All right."

"How did you find out about Mrs. Ruthenda'e and the man Bruno?"

"Oh, that must be my secret!"

"See here, my friend, I have been for a long

time trying to convey a message to Mrs. Ruthendale. Tell me where I can find her."

"Not now."

"Why not?"

"She may not like it."

"Tell me where to find that woman and I will give you five hundred."

"Not to-day."

"Well, see here; tell me where I can find Bruno."

"When you give me the money, you shall have the information you want."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want that information, and I have got five hundred with me I was going to use for another purpose; but you shall have it."

"Give it to me."

"Let me have the information first."

"No, sir; I can not trust you."

"And yet you wish me to trust you with five hundred dollars."

"You needn't, if you don't wish to do so."

"Will you really give me the information?"

"Yes."

Knight drew forth five hundred dollars, and handed it to Leonardi.

Brandon had no fears as to the fellow's honesty, since he knew that a pair of sharp eyes were upon him.

Leonardi took the money, put it in his pocket, and said, coolly:

"That's all right!"

"What's all right?"

"The money."

"But the information?"

"Oh! you shall have it."

"Well, give it to me."

"Some other time."

"You're joking."

"No; I am in earnest."

"You're a fraud!"

"You're another!"

Some hot words now passed between the two men, recriminations that betrayed Knight into admissions that would hang him.

It was to get the fellow in such a hole that Brandon had brought about the interview.

Knight suddenly drew a knife, and rose from his seat, when Leonardi brought him back to his chair by holding a pistol under his nose.

Bayard Knight沉ined down, and asked:

"Why do you try this game on me? Why do you lie to me?"

"You owe me this money, and how many lies have you told me in the past?"

"Well, we will have a drink, and talk the matter over like friends."

"I am willing."

Knight rang the bell, and when the waiter came, ordered glasses and a bottle of brandy. Knight filled a glass and drank.

Leonardi followed suit.

Knight pointed to a picture on the wall, and made a remark that distracted Leonardi's attention.

As the latter turned away, Knight dropped a liquid out of a vial into his brandy.

The men then resumed their conversation, and Leonardi took the glass of liquor in his hand, and was about raising it to his lips, when there came a sudden pistol report, and the glass was shattered from his grasp.

Bayard Knight uttered a cry, and rushed from the room.

A moment later Brandon entered.

He found Leonardi standing and gazing in a dazed sort of way at the fragments of the glass.

"Well, old man, you are surprised?" said Brandon.

"Did you fire that shot?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"To save your life!"

"Save my life?"

"Yes."

"How was it in danger?"

"That glass of wine was poisoned."

"Poisoned?"

"Yes."

"Who by?"

Do you remember when Knight called your attention to that picture?"

"Yes."

"He took that opportunity to pour a poison into your liquor."

"The villain!"

The next day Brandon started upon a strange errand.

He had made up his mind to find the man Bruno at all hazards.

Carefully he had scanned the advertisement columns of the "Herald."

He saw several advertisements where women advertised to take in gentlemen's washing.

A grim smile played upon the face of the king of the detectives, as one certain advertisement met his gaze.

"I guess I will call and see you, madam!" he muttered, and left his office.

He walked across town, and halted before an alley-way that led to some rear houses.

Brandon recognized the locality as one of the most dangerous in New York.

In fact, the court-yard in the rear had become known as "Murder Plaza," owing to the many murders that had been committed there during fights between the occupants of the different tenements.

There was not an ordinary policeman in New York who would attempt to go there alone to make an arrest, even in open daylight.

Brandon was on a certain "lay," and, when looking over the advertisements in the morning paper, he knew his locality the moment he saw it was to apply at the place near where he stood.

Innocent people in open daylight, knowing nothing about the place, would go there, thinking it to be an ordinary tenement locality.

The advantage of the place for thieves and general criminals was, that there was not a person living thereabouts who would dare on their lives to furnish any information to the police.

Brandon was a man who cared nothing for locality.

He would crawl through a two-foot tunnel underground with the certain knowledge that it opened into a chamber occupied by a whole gang of assassins.

He had once performed such afeat, and had captured his man.

He only stopped on the occasion of which we write, in order to more certainly get the bearings.

At length he started up the alley-way, and, entering a low doorway, ascended a rickety stairway toward a room on the upper floor.

He was disguised as a respectable-looking old gentleman, with gray hair and spectacles.

His walk was feeble, and his whole manner indicative of a respectable, well-to-do old man. At length he rapped at a door.

A shrill voice from within called:

"Come in!"

The detective raised the latch, and stepped across the threshold.

A strange spectacle met his gaze.

An untutored visitor would have been deceived, but the keen-eyed detective took the whole situation in at a glance.

Little did that woman with the shrill voice dream of the strange sort of angel she was entertaining in disguise, nor did she dream that at a glance the same individual had solved the deep mystery of her existence.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### AN UNEXPECTED DENOUEMENT.

At the close of the previous chapter, we intimated that Brandon, the detective, encountered an unusual sight.

To an ordinary observer there was nothing unusual, but to the keen detective it was otherwise.

A woman, neatly dressed in very plain clothes, and resembling in some respects a thrifty and tidy laundress, stood before him.

Alas! it was a pretty "make-up," but that slender, well-rounded form was never given to standing over the wash-tub, and those delicate, white hands, with their slender fingers, were not accustomed to wringing the suds out of clothes.

"Is this the place from which a laundress advertised?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir," came the answer, in a slightly German accent. The latter was a clever dodge, as the German accent was only simulated.

"I am in search of a laundress," said the detective.

"I am ready to take your clothes, sir; times are hard, and my husband is out of work."

"Ah, yes! I know times are hard, but I hope you are an experienced laundress, as I am very particular about my clothes."

"Ah, yes, sir. I can make them white and beautiful; but walk in, sir, and take a seat."

Brandon stepped across the room, and seated himself on a chair.

The woman, who suddenly became very cool and self-possessed, took a seat beside him, and,

fixing her really handsome eyes upon him, said in a very pretty and bewitching manner:

"Ah, I am so glad a customer came to-day!"

"Why to-day?"

"Because I spent the last cent of money I had to put that advertisement in the paper."

"Are you so poor as that?"

"Oh, yes, we are awful poor; and I know a nice, handsome old gentleman like you would not object to give me a little money in advance, to buy bread."

"Have you children?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Where are they?"

"At school."

"You have children big enough to go to school?"

"Yes."

"Where is your husband?"

The woman dropped her eyes in a timid manner, and answered:

"He has gone out to look for work."

"Well, I will pay you for one dozen of pieces;" and the detective took out a roll of bills, and selected a one dollar to give to the woman.

The seeming old man's manner was perfectly natural and artless like; but in reality, while pretending to count his money, which he displayed so freely, he was watching the woman keenly from behind his spectacles.

He needed not to watch the cunning glance of her eyes, nor the strange look that came upon her face at the display of money, to confirm his first suspicions.

He handed the money to the woman, who took it, and exclaimed:

"O! you was such a nice, goot oldt man! alreadly I love you, you vos so goot!"

"You are a pretty woman, and I reckon a good woman," said the old gentleman, innocently.

"Yes; and in our country when we receive a favor we always like dat we kiss our friend. I vos like dat! I kiss you, you vos so goot!"

"Oh, dear, no! oh, dear, no!" answered the old man, in a peculiar, hesitating tone, and yet displaying by manner that he would not object to a good, honest kiss from the pretty woman.

"Oh, I must kiss you!" exclaimed the woman, and she suddenly threw herself upon the old man's lap, cast her arms about his neck, and pressed her lips against his cheek.

At that moment the door opened, and a strong, able-bodied, villainous-faced man stalked into the room.

With a scream the woman leaped from the detective's lap, and, with a look of wild passion and rage in her face, exclaimed, furiously:

"You old villain! you wretch! to dare take advantage of a poor woman during the absence of her husband!"

The detective appeared to be terribly confused and frightened, and his fright seemingly increased as the man locked the room door and drew a murderous-looking knife from under his jacket.

"Oh, you old wretch!" moaned the woman.

"My dear, what has happened?" asked the man, in a stern voice.

"Oh, my dear husband! that old villain! that old wretch!" and the woman commenced to sob and cry, while tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Tell me, my darling, what has happened? if he has insulted you I will kill him!" and the man cast a threatening glance toward the seemingly confused and frightened old man.

"Oh, I dare not tell you what he did!"

"You must tell me."

"Oh, he said such awful things to me, and offered me money!"

"Offered you money?"

"Yes."

"What did he offer you money for?"

"Oh! I dare not tell you for what!"

"I saw you on his lap."

"Yes; he caught hold of me, and I begged him to let me go, but he would not, and the old wretch, he insulted me!"

The man advanced toward the detective, and asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see your wife about doing some washing for me."

"Ah, you did, eh? And finding her alone and unprotected, you tried to take advantage of her?"

"I did not on my honor I did not!" answered the old man, in a trembling voice.

"That won't do, old man; I saw her in your arms!"

"She came and sat on my lap."

"What! How dare you say such a thing about my wife?"

"Do not hurt me!"

"I will!"

"Oh, no; I will cry murder!"

"You will, eh?"

"Oh! let me get out of here!"

"Let you get out of here, eh, after insulting my wife? No!"

The man caught hold of the old man, and swung him round.

"Oh, spare me!"

"No, you must die!"

All this time the man's manner was furious, and his looks fierce and threatening.

"Do not kill me!"

"You must die!"

"Oh, my good woman, do not let me be killed!" pleaded the old man, appealing to the siren who had "put up" the job on him.

"Don't kill him, John!" begged the wife.

"Yes, I will!"

"Oh, have mercy; he is an old man!"

"But he insulted you; he has wronged me; he must die!"

"Let me speak to him a moment."

"Well, speak to him!"

The woman stepped beside the detective, and whispered in his ear.

"My husband is awful poor: offer him money, and he will let you off."

"I have no money," answered the old man.

"Yes, yes; I saw you have plenty of money."

"It is not my money."

"No matter."

At that moment the man advanced, and exclaimed:

"It is no use to beg! His time has come! I will wait no longer."

"Oh, spare me!"

"See here, old man, I am poor; give me two hundred dollars for the wrong you have done me, and I will forgive you, and let you go."

"I have no money."

"Oh, yes, you have!"

"No; I have no money."

"I saw you have a roll of bills."

"You saw me have a roll of bills?"

"Yes."

"I can not give you any money."

Suddenly the old man's manner changed, and, in a calm, self-possessed tone, he repeated:

"If I don't give you any money, you will kill me, eh?"

The man noticed the change in the old man's tone, and exhibited considerable surprise; but the next moment he ripped out a terrible oath, and made an offer to catch the old man by the arm, at the same time raising his knife once more.

The play, however, was coming to an end.

The detective suddenly let up the muzzle of a pistol right under the would-be assassin's nose.

With an oath the latter leaped back.

The wife also suddenly dropped her German accent, and a serious look came over her face.

"Now, see here, my good people," said the detective, in a perfectly cool manner, "your game is played!"

The man had drawn a pistol.

Before he could raise it, Brandon said:

"Don't lift your 'barker,' Bruno; I've got you dead to rights!"

At the mention of the name Bruno, the woman uttered a scream, while the man turned pale, and let the pistol fall from his hands.

Suddenly all the gameness had been taken out of him.

## CHAPTER XX.

AGAIN CONFIDENCE PLAYERS MATCHED.

"I HAVE been looking for you, my man, and I've run you down at last!"

The woman was first to recover from her terror and surprise.

She crossed the room and whispered something in her husband's ear.

The man appeared to recover a little, and the woman crossed the room toward the detective.

The latter was on his guard, but not exactly prepared for the singular little scene that followed.

With a bound like a cat the woman suddenly sprung upon the detective, and at the same time she exclaimed:

"Now, John!"

They were dealing with the wrong man, however.

The detective did not attempt at first to throw off the tigerish woman, but kept his pistol around behind her, and said:

"Don't move, Bruno, or you are a dead man!" at the same moment Brandon drew up one of his feet with tremendous force, and, getting a brace, literally pried the woman off his body without having recourse to his hands at all.

As she slipped over and fell upon the floor, Brandon sprung over her body, and, quicker than a flash, seized Bruno, upset him, and had the bracelets on him in a jiffy.

The jig was up.

The woman made an attempt to pick up the pistol that had fallen from her husband's grasp, but in a second she also was ornamented with the bracelets, and the level-headed detective had matters all his own way.

"Now, my beauties, I've got you dead to rights. We'll talk a little business."

Handcuffed as he was, Bruno got up from the floor, and seated himself upon a chair, and as he did so, he said:

"What racket are you 'piping' me on?"

"Well, I reckon I've just got you on a nice little racket, haven't I? But to come down to pan, I'm on you for a murder that took place here a few months ago, when your wife here had another game than she had to-day."

Both man and woman were thoroughly subdued now, and a ghostly expression came over the faces of both.

"In fact," went on the detective, "I've got you down for two or three little rackets; I reckon on your time has come."

The man was silent, but the woman squealed.

"I have only been in with Bruno during the last few months," she said.

"Oh, that's all right, my lady, I've got you down fine enough! I've seen you in better company than you have got on now."

"You never saw me before."

"Well, maybe I am mistaken, but you are not my principal game just now."

Brandon now spoke up, and said:

"I had nothing to do with the little job that happened here a few months ago. I was in Philadelphia, in the lock-up there; got a square, honest alibi on that job."

"You weren't in Philadelphia when you kidnapped a young lady under pay of Bayard Knight a few months ago."

"Ah! that's it, is it?" exclaimed the criminal, with an expressive grunt.

"Well, we will open up on that little deal first, I reckon."

"Well, I had nothing to do with that."

"Oh, no, you and Gimpy and Blakie were only on a lark when that little job was put through."

"Gimpy's been 'hocked,' and squealed, eh?"

"So must you squeal, if you don't want to dance on a swing floor."

"Look here, are you heavy on finding that gal?"

"Oh! I reckon I'm pretty close on to her track."

"If I give things dead away, will you give a lead a chance to light out?"

"All I can promise is to be easy on you."

"You give a regular clearance?"

"No; you're in too deep."

"Then, I'm nunn!"

"You will gain nothing by being 'nunn,' and only make me more dead against you."

"What do you want to find out?"

"Just where you took that girl to, the night you abducted her."

"You ought to have got that from Gimpy."

"Well, I'm looking for it from you."

"You will go light on me if I give that away?"

"Yes."

"Well, we took that gal to the house where Bayard Knight lives."

"Is she there now?"

"Can't tell you that."

"You had no hand in taking her somewhere else?"

"No, sir."

"Well, how do you want to leave things?"

I'm going to take you and your wife out walking."

"See here; the first favor I ask of you is, let my wife stay here."

"To hatch mischief?"

"No, but she is not in on any of my little games; and if you do me this turn, I'll be your friend Bruno's hard man, but a good friend to one who does him a good turn."

Brandon thought matters over, and concluded to let the woman remain.

Going to her, he said, in a light, mocking tone:

"I'm going to be a real nice, pretty old woman; I'm going to take off your bracelets."

The woman smiled, but there was a dangerous glitter in her eyes, nevertheless.

Releasing the woman, Brandon led Bruno away.

The parting between the confederates in crime was brief, but the detective saw that the two wicked beings really loved each other.

He had met such cases before, where criminal man and wife had the greatest affection for each other.

Bruno was taken to police headquarters, and put in a cell provided for "probationary" prisoners; that is, arrested persons who are not turned over to a justice, but are held to abide the arrest of a confederate, or the collection of more positive evidence.

Having disposed of Bruno, and gained just such information as he most desired, Brandon proceeded to his room.

He had decided upon a desperate game.

He felt satisfied that Renie was a prisoner in Bayard Knight's house, and he had made up his mind to enter that house.

Not with a search-warrant, and by authority of law, but secretly, and on his own responsibility—taking all chances.

The detective found a house on the street in the rear of Knight's residence, where they took boarders, and, properly rigged out and provided, our hero engaged rooms there.

At once he went to bed and slept after dinner until midnight.

At the hour named he arose and commenced preparations for the excursion he had in hand.

At length he passed from his room, and on tip-toe stole down-stairs to the yard.

Once in the yard, he climbed upon the fence, and passed along until he came to the yard belonging to the house where Bayard Knight lived.

The detective was dressed in rough clothes and every way equipped like an experienced burglar.

Alighting from the fence into Knight's yard, he was stealing cautiously along when a gleam of light suddenly shot out from one of the lower windows.

The detective came to a halt, and had his eyes fixed on the window, when, to his surprise, he saw the shadow of a crouching human form cast upon the opposite fence.

Another man was in the yard.

Brandon dropped on his hands and knees in the darkness, and watched the "other fellow."

It soon became evident that the chap was on some secret errand.

Possibly a common burglar and real thief. The detective was forced to indulge an inward chuckle at the singular situation.

The discovery of the other fellow, however, was only the first of a series of surprises.

Through the window, whence the light gleamed, he could see the shadows of different men cast upon the white inside curtain.

"By George!" he muttered, "my friend Knight appears to have company to-night."

The house had a back porch that ran clear across the rear of the house.

While the detective watched, he saw the other fellow crawl up the steps, and move, belly fashion, along the stoop to the windows.

A moment Brandon considered, and at length made up his mind upon a course of action.

## CHAPTER XXI.

A MOST SINGULAR COMBAT.

BRANDON had decided to make a prisoner of the "other fellow."

Retiring toward the extreme rear of the yard, he secured a position from which he could watch the man's movements and then made a slight noise.

The man had just crawled opposite one of the windows, but when he heard the noise he rapidly crawled away, and descended the stoop.

The detective made another noise, and could see that the man had risen to his feet, and was peering through the darkness in the direction from whence the noise came.

"All right, Johnny, I'm here," muttered the detective, and he made a third movement.

The man advanced slowly and cautiously toward the rear of the yard.

Brandon was bothered by the man's boldness, and equally as curious concerning his motive.

There was a grape-arbor trailing over a rear building, and the detective crawled through the dense foliage, and, dropping upon his knees and breast, laid himself on the grass plot right in the way of the cautiously approaching man.

The latter advanced and halted, and then advanced again.

He was evidently on his guard against a surprise.

In fact, the greatest surprise remained with the detective, as he could not conceive the purpose of the fellow whose movements were so cautious, and unlike those of an ordinary burglar.

A man of the latter class would not have stopped to investigate, but would have made a hasty retreat at once.

A moment passed.

Not more than ten feet intervened between Brandon and the other man.

The latter had come to a dead halt.

At length from his pocket he drew a masked lantern, slipped the slide mask, and flashed the light around in different directions.

It was a critical moment.

The ray of light might fall upon our hero, reveal his position, and the exposure invite a bullet.

Brandon crept forward a few feet and then sprung up.

Before he had time to speak the man leaped forward, and the two strangers were locked in a deadly embrace.

A terrible struggle followed.

Both men appeared anxious to avoid unnecessary noise, and yet each struggled vigorously for the mastery over the other.

The men were pretty evenly matched, and the struggle was a tough one.

From side to side, and backward and forward, they forced each other.

Both were powerful men, and both were well posted in all the little tricks of a wrestle.

Both also appeared to hold the other so that neither could have recourse to a weapon.

At length Brandon got the grape-vine lock on his antagonist, and managed to throw him to the ground.

The under man managed to secure his knife.

Brandon became aware of his danger, and for the first time spoke.

"Hold on, my man: don't try your knife, or you're a dead man! Keep still, and you're safe."

In a tone of astonishment the stranger uttered the name "Brandon!"

"Yes, Brandon—who in thunder are you?"

"Kepler."

Brandon at once rose from off the man, and, with a low laugh, exclaimed:

"By gosh, Charley, you gave me a tough tussle!"

As the man rose to his feet, he said:

"I'll be hanged if you ain't the only man in New York could have got the better of me!"

Kepler was a detective, and a most intimate friend, and at times side-partner of our hero in important jobs.

"What brought you here?" asked Kepler.

"I'm 'piping' for a lost lamb, supposed to be in that house yonder; and now what brought you here?"

"I'm on the lay for a gang of forgers. A big job is on the carpet to swindle a big bank, and it's my opinion the gang are inside laying their plans."

The two gallant detectives had thus met in the dark at the same place on different errands, and in the gloom had had a desperate encounter.

Both felt that it was lucky that no greater harm had come of the mischance, as both were cool headed, brave men, and at times very desperate and ready to fall back upon their weapons.

Brandon explained his errand, and the two men determined to enter the house together, and kill two birds, if possible, with one stone.

"We will go in the house," said Brandon.

"I've got no kit with me," answered Kepler.

"I have," returned Brandon; and he picked from the grass, where he had thrown it, a small canvas bag.

The two detectives opened the bag; and, selecting such articles as they wanted, cautiously moved toward the house.

They descended to the area, and soon succeeded in opening the rear basement door.

Inside within the house both removed their

boots, took their pistols in their hands, and ascended the basement stairs to the parlor floor.

Creeping along they put their ears to the key hole and listened.

Within the room were five men.

They were flashy-looking fellows, all save one.

The latter was a delicate-looking young man, handsome and having no appearance of being a hardened villain like his older companions.

The men were gathered around a table on which were placed writing materials and different colored inks.

The young man appeared pale, nervous, and frightened.

Brandon had his eye to the keyhole, and could see and hear all that was going on within the room.

One thing astonished him: Bayard Knight, the owner of the house, was not present.

One of the men the detective recognized as a notorious confidence man. The others were strangers to him—thieves or rogues from some foreign city, who had never before come under his observation.

A dead silence for a few minutes prevailed in the room.

The four older men were gathered around the younger man, who stood with a pen in his hand, and on the table lay a check.

The little money token was duly made out and signed, save one additional indorsement; and it was evident that the young man was a skillful penman who had been brought to do the necessary and final manipulation.

He hesitated.

The silence was at length broken by one of the men, who said:

"Sign it, and you are worth ten thousand dollars!"

The young man tossed the pen upon the table, and exclaimed:

"I will not sign it! The thing won't go through, and I will be ruined for life!"

"Sign it, I say!" said the man.

"I will not!"

The man raised a pistol to the youth's face, and said, in a fierce, threatening tone:

"Sign it, I say, or by Heaven, I'll send a ball through your brain!"

"Would you murder me?"

"I will murder you if you do not write the acceptance across the face of that check!"

Brandon's blood boiled; but the moment had not quite arrived when it was time for him to act.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A GAME SPOILED.

THE young man's face became ghastly, and yet he made no movement to sign the check.

"Will you sign?" asked the villain who held the leveled pistol.

"I dare not sign!"

"Why did you promise to sign, and come here?"

"I was wild with liquor. It would ruin me soul and body to commit that crime!"

The man drew his watch from his pocket, and, in a voice of terrible meaning, said:

"I give you just three minutes to sign that check, or die!"

"Oh, Heaven!" murmured the youth, "is there no deliverance for me?"

"Sign or die!"

"I will die then, in my sober senses. I will never commit so great a crime."

"Remember, the three minutes are fleeting away."

"You need not wait. Shoot! I'll not sign that check!"

The youth spoke in a firm, determined voice, like one who fully meant what he said.

A baffled look came over the face of the man who held the pistol.

He evidently realized that the young man was made of sterner stuff than he had judged.

At this moment one of the other men stepped forward, and said:

"Hold, pard; you are not going to murder the man?"

"I'll kill him, by Heaven!"

The other man drew a pistol, and exclaimed:

"You shoot, and I'll shoot too! I ain't going to stand by and see a human being murdered in cold blood!"

The two men exchanged glances.

Suddenly there came the report of a pistol; but the ball buried itself in the ceiling.

The arm of the pretended would-be assassin was struck up by the fellow who had interfered.

Another man than Brandon might have rushed in to the rescue; but our hero knew well the game that was being played, and had no fears concerning the youth's life.

The latter stood perfectly still when the pistol exploded, and proved himself a nervy and wonderfully game youth.

A moment's silence followed, when the man who had interfered, addressing the youth, said:

"Charley, I want you to sign that check, but I'll be hanged if you are going to be harmed if you don't."

"Thank you," replied the youth, when the man continued:

"See here, you want money. You know I've got your finances down pretty fine."

"I can not sign the check."

The man put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a large roll of bills. Shaking the money in the young man's face he said:

"See here, sonny, here are five thousand dollars enough to get you out of all your trouble, and buy those diamonds for Emma."

A young, preternatural light gleamed in the youth's eyes.

It was evident that the money had a greater influence over his will than the fear of instant death.

"Sign that check, and the money is yours."

The young man was seized with a fit of trembling, while his master continued:

"You need take no chances; we will take all the risk, and you make your divvy clean sure in advance."

For the first time the youth spoke:

"How much money is there in your hand?"

"A cool five thousand."

"And it's mine the moment the check is signed!"

"Every dollar: and you run no risk. There is no man in this crowd to squelch, and you need never know us after to night. No one saw you come here; no one will see you go away. You stand a good character now; but, without this money, you know, within a week all will be blown—all is over with you. Emma will go back on you, and you must fetch up in prison, anyhow."

"Five thousand!" murmured the youth.

"Yes, five thousand; and freedom, honor, and safety."

"By Heaven, I'll sign the check!" exclaimed the youth, as he grasped the pen.

A look, significant and satisfactory, passed between the forgers.

The youth made several scratches on a piece of paper, and then quickly and dexterously wrote an acceptance across the face of the check.

"It's done!" he said, and there was a fearful huskiness in his voice.

"Good boy, Charley!" said the forger who had held the money, as he slipped it back in his pocket while another took possession of the check.

"Give me the five thousand," said the youth, "and I will be gone."

"To-morrow," said the forger, coolly.

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean? You promised me the five thousand as soon as the check was signed."

"You must be out of your head!"

"And you won't give it to me!"

"Have you got rats in your upper story?" sneered the forger.

An agonized look came over the young forger's face, and there was a wail in his voice, as he muttered:

"Sold!"

"No, no, Charley, we will deal on the square. You shall have your rake when the money is fished upon the check."

"You promised the five thousand to sign!"

"Not much!"

The young man moved away from the table, stepped across the room, took his hat from a chair, and, in a perfectly cool and self-possessed voice, said:

"Gentlemen, I will bid you good-evening."

"Where are you going, Charley?"

"To wait for my rake in that check."

An idea seemed to cross the mind of one of the forgers, and he said:

"Look here, Charley, no capers. By Heaven, if you have made up your mind to squeal, you'll only get yourself sent up! We'll all sweat against you."

"I won't squeal; but I will get square if the money promised me is not paid within twenty-four hours!"

The two detectives were witnesses to the

whole scene and listeners to the whole conversation.

As the young man moved toward the door, Brandon whispered a few words to Kepler, and both men passed back toward the rear of the hall.

The young man left the parlors, and passed out into the street.

One second later, Kepler the detective followed out after him.

The youth proceeded up the street, and, when about two blocks away from the scene of his crime felt a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

The youth turned and faced the detective, Kepler.

"What do you want?"

"I want you," answered the detective.

"Want me?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Forgery!"

The young man uttered an exclamation, supplemented with the remark:

"So soon?"

"Yes, my young friend; punishment follows like a shadow close on the track of crime."

"Well, I suppose the jig is up!" and with the words the youth clapped a revolver to his temple and fired.

A friendly hand, however, guided by a quick eye, saved the would-be suicide from the fearful consequences of his rash act.

Detectives are always on the look-out for just such like attempts, and from what Kepler had seen of the youth, he was doubly on his guard.

"See here, young man, that wouldn't have minded matters."

"I will do it yet. Your arrest won't amount to anything."

"Oh, yes, it will! Now listen; I know all the circumstances under which you wrote that acceptance."

"Then you know how great a villain I am?"

"I do not consider you a villain, and I have not arrested you to ruin you, but to save you."

"Save me!"

"Yes."

"From what?"

"From the consequences of your last act, and from becoming a rogue, indeed."

"That's odd talk to come from a detective."

"How do you know I am a detective?"

"Ah, that's easy! I'm an old New York boy."

"Well, it may be strange talk, but it's yours talk, and now listen; you were compelled to sign that check with a pistol at your head!"

"No, that didn't work."

"Well, it was tried!"

"Yes."

"That's all I saw—that saves you, and now listen; I am on the track of those chaps who got you into this deal."

"Well?"

"No harm shall come to you. They are old hands at the business; they would 'bilk' you out of your share, even if their job went through."

"I know that."

"You intended to warn the bank of its danger, without any regard to the consequences to yourself?"

The young man gave a start, and answered:

"How do you know that?"

"I'm right anyhow."

"Well?"

"You must not warn the bank."

"You will save me that trouble, I suppose?"

"Well, not just the way you imagine."

"I shall do it myself."

"Wait. Now take things easy, and listen to me. How much are you behindhand with the bank?"

"How do you know I am connected with a bank?"

"Ah, that's all right; and I know you are behindhand in your accounts. Now, how much?"

"It's none of your business."

"You're a game 'un; but promise good, and I am going to see you through. I like you; you are not a rogue at heart, and I've taken a fancy to you. I'm bound to save you, whether you fall in easy with me or not."

"You can't fool me. You're putting up a job!"

"No, I am not; and the proof that I am not lies in the fact that I intend letting you go. I shall not arrest you."

The young man was silent a moment, but at length inquired

"Are you on the square?"

"I am; and working in your interest."

"I am only a few hundred feet behind at the bank; but it's as bad as though it were as many thousands, if they drop on it."

"I'll let you have the money to set your account square?"

"Why should you do this?"

"Well, I'll tell you some day, but now listen; you shall make your account good. I'll cover your signing of the check by claiming that you were acting as a decoy duck for me—in fact, you unconsciously were, as I could have prevented you from signing, if I had chosen."

At this moment two men were seen coming down the street, and the detective drew the young man aside.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### BRANDON PASSES THROUGH FIRE.

After the two men had passed, the detective explained to the young man the whole plan.

Charley Brighton was a shrewd young fellow, and saw through the whole arrangement, and inwardly thanked a good Providence that had saved him from the terrible consequences of some months of wrong-doing, into which he had been led by fast company and fast living.

In the meantime, Brandon was working his little game in Bayard Knight's house.

Our hero was not on the "forgery lay." His purpose was to recover the missing girl, Renie Ruthendale, who, he had reason to believe, was concealed in that house.

After the departure of the young man, Charley Brighton, the four forgers held a sort of jubilee meeting, and Brandon picked up a great many points for his friend Kepler.

After half an hour the men took their departure, and during the whole time Bayard Knight had not put in an appearance.

Brandon commenced a thorough search of the house.

He proceeded upstairs, found the rooms easy of access on the second floor, but did not encounter a single sign of Knight.

It was a three-story house, and he proceeded to the third floor.

Two rooms he found open, but the third was locked.

Hope rose in the officer's bosom.

He had his bag with him, and, producing a skeleton key, soon unlocked the door.

He was in darkness, but a ready match soon gave him light.

He turned the gas on low, and commenced a search.

He was speedily thrilled by a discovery.

On the floor lay a dress. One glance was sufficient for the keen-eyed detective.

It was the very dress Renie had on every time he had seen her.

A further search revealed the hat she had worn.

The question was, Where was the girl?

He had at least struck a trail.

A most thorough and careful search failed to reveal anything further.

It struck the officer as strange that he had not met a living soul in the house, save the four criminals whom he had "piped" down in the parlor.

He descended again to the second floor.

Here he turned on the gas lower, and soon made up his mind that he was in the room occupied by the master of the house.

It struck him then that probably Knight had sent all his people away, as he was playing a masked game, and feared that, when the gamblers met in his house, some little point might be given away.

No burglar ever went through a man's effects with more freedom and *sang froid* than did the detective through the effects of the man Knight.

He was hunting for clews, and his search was destined to be rewarded in a most simple, yet astonishing and important manner.

Brandon opened locks and drawers with perfect ease, and came across certain documents that he knew would serve a good purpose at some future time; but not the least sign could he find leading to the whereabouts of Renie.

He found some clothing in a wardrobe, and yet was his search unrewarded.

At length he espied an old bundle lying on the floor of a pantry.

*Eureka!* here was something.

He undid the bundle and a complete suit of ragged old clothes, including slouched hat, and all, rolled upon the floor.

"A disguise!" muttered the detective, and he commenced going through the pockets.

He found lots of little odds and ends, but no clews.

He was about casting the clothes aside in disappointed manner, when just the minute corner of a little printed card peeped out of the watch-pocket of the vest.

A glad smile came over the detective's face.

It was a little thing to find, and, to one less keen would have proved meaningless; to the detective it spoke volumes.

It almost told him, in so many words, just where to go to look for the missing girl.

It was the one half of an excursion railroad-ticket to a town back in the Jersey mountains.

The fact of finding the ticket was not so much in itself, but the finding of it in the disguise clothing was very significant.

The detective rolled up the clothing as he had found it, restored the ticket to the pocket, turned off the gas, and was just starting to leave the room, when the darkness was illumined by a flash, followed by a loud report, and a pistol-ball whistled past his ear.

Down to the floor dropped the detective, and then he commenced to crawl in the direction whence the shot had come.

A second shot followed, but the ball went far over his head, as the pistol had evidently been aimed toward the spot where he had stood when the first shot was fired.

He had taken a hasty survey of the lay of the rooms, and, instead of seeking an encounter, thought it better for his purpose to escape without being recognized, if possible.

He crawled to the passage-way leading from the front to the rear room.

He reached the latter, rose to his feet, passed out into the hall, and made for the head of the stairs.

In the darkness he ran against a man.

There was no more chance for dodging.

One blow sent the man reeling against the wall, and Brandon leaped down the stairs.

The man commenced firing his pistol, and, at the same time, shouted in a most lusty manner:

"Thieves, thieves! Murder, murder!"

At the foot of the stairs the detective sprung into the arms of a woman.

The latter proved herself to be muscular and game. She seized the supposed burglar, and set up a shrill scream of "Murder! murder!"

Poor Brandon found matters getting hot.

All he could do was to seize the woman in his arms and give her a wild toss through the parlor door, and away he sped down the kitchen stairs.

Here again he met a woman, and ran clear into the last as he had the first.

The house, which a few moments before appeared to be deserted, had suddenly become alive with people.

The last woman, however, fortunately did not stop to show fight, but ran screaming away into the basement, where she threw herself upon the floor.

The detective at length made the yard; but alas! the alarm had been given, and a cop was at his heels.

Brandon leaped the rear fence, but had hardly touched the ground when a burly policeman came tumbling after him.

A grapple followed.

Brandon tried to make himself known to the frantic cop; but the latter was a greenhorn, and would not hear it, but commenced laying about wildly with his club.

The detective got mad.

He was a wonderfully powerful man, and, suddenly seizing the policeman, i.e. his arms, he raised him aloft, and actually threw him over the fence into the yard from whence he had just come.

Once again free, the detective started to dash away, but the one cop had been re-enforced by two or three others.

A couple got on the fence, and one on the rear building, and all three commenced a pistol duel.

The whole neighborhood had become aroused.

The period for explanation had passed.

It now became a matter of life and death with the king of the detectives.

It was about the hottest spot he had ever been in, all his life.

He managed to leap a fence and get beyond the range of fire of the policemen, out suddenly the rear window of the house of the yard where he had taken refuge, was raised and a man appeared with a rifle in his hand.

The last chap would not take an

plantation was most certain, and poor Brandon did about the tallest gymnastics he had ever indulged in.

Death appeared to grin at him at every turn. Over he bounded into another yard; but a cop had managed to strike the fence, and commenced blazing away.

Afterward, in relating the wonderful experience of that fearful night, the detective always said that it was a mystery to him how, amid such a perfect hail-storm of bullets, he escaped without a scratch.

By rapid jumping, however, he managed to get beyond his immediate pursuers, and finally found a place where he lay low for a while.

At length he stole forth, and thought he was all right, when suddenly a man sprung upon him.

"Hold on, my heart! I've got you safe and sound now!" was the salutation that fell upon Brandon's ear.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### A CLEW AT LAST.

OUR hero's troubles, however, for the time being, were over.

He recognized the voice of the man, who proved to be a brother detective who was on the search for the supposed burglar.

It took Brandon but a second to make himself known and explain matters, and the thing was all right.

The detective who was looking for him had sent all the cops away, and it was an easy matter for Brandon to reach his temporary quarters.

Upon the following day our hero had an interview with Lady Kate.

Brandon was just preparing to go out to Jersey, when Lady Kate entered his office.

"I want to see you," said the woman.

"Well, I am glad you have come!"

"Why?"

"I was just about leaving town."

"On what lay?"

"I don't think it would be wise to tell you just at present."

"You have found a clew to Renie Ruthendale?"

"Suppose I have?"

"You must tell me about it."

"Not yet."

"You must!"

"In good time."

"No, now; my life is in danger; I know not at what moment I may be murdered!"

"By whom?"

"Bayard Knight; he has discovered my identity and is on my track!"

"If he has discovered your identity, he has succeeded in doing what I have failed in."

"Have you not suspected since recent occurrences?"

"Yes; I have had a suspicion."

"What have you suspected?"

"Should I speak right out?"

"Certainly."

"I have suspected that you were the widow of old Ruthendale, the mother of the missing Renie."

"You are right!" answered Lady Kate, as a pallor overspread her handsome face.

"Why have you found it necessary, Mrs. Ruthendale, to go in disguise?"

"I have had two reasons."

"Name them."

"In the first place I assumed the rôle of a detective in order to learn the business, and gather the necessary experience that might some day aid me in recovering my child."

"You have always suspected she lived?"

"Yes."

"What other reason had you for hiding yourself?"

"Do you not know?"

"I do not."

"I am under indictment for murder."

"You under indictment for murder?"

"Yes."

"How comes that?"

"It was accomplished by that villain, Knight; he could not have had me convicted, but the excitement of a trial would have killed me."

"Bayard Knight's career of villainy is drawing to a close."

"I fear not; even if I should find my child I could not establish her identity."

"Oh, you might!"

"No, you do not understand all the circumstances."

"Possibly you do not," said the detective with a strange smile on his face.

"You may have accomplished something that I know nothing about; I do not forget that you are the king of detectives."

"Well, if I ever recover Renie I will guarantee to prove her identity."

"I have heard from my lawyers that the case of this Knight against the estate is likely to be decided in his favor."

"But you can reappear upon the scene, and that will knock him over."

"I fear not; you have no idea what a deep and cunning man he is."

"Well, you have no idea what a deep and cunning man I am! I have got the turn on our mutual friend."

"Oh! I know you are a keen and sharp man, but you have not had as many weeks to work in as that man Knight has had years."

"What game has he worked?"

"He has managed to prove that I was never Mr. Ruthendale's wife; that Renie was not his child."

"You say he has proved this?"

"Well, he is about to prove it."

The detective fixed his keen eyes on the woman, and asked, in a meaning tone:

"Will it be true what he proves?"

"As false as his own false heart!"

"It will all be concocted proof?"

"Every item of it."

"You need have no fear. I have got the turn on that man, and you are aware that I never speak unless I know just what I am talking about."

"That man is seeking to murder me; only last night I was followed by two murderous-looking fellows."

"You must only be on your guard for a few hours longer, then I will be in a position to proceed; and the devil help Bayard Knight, as the man will speedily be where all his little schemes will avail him nothing."

"But I fear ere that is accomplished my life will have paid forfeit to that villain."

"Why are you in such terror of him?"

"Two strange-looking men, I tell you, have been upon my track, and I believe I have only preserved my life by avoiding giving them a chance to murder me. I would leave town, but they are so closely on my track that they would most assuredly trail me, and I would be at their mercy."

"You are right there, Mrs. Ruthendale, you must not leave town; but you can remain quietly in your home."

"They have tracked me to my home."

"Ah, ha! that changes the complexion of things. Those rascals must be attended to at once."

"If I were not afraid of secret assassination, although I am but a woman I would not fear them; but to be murdered in my bed!"

"I will protect you, madam, you need have no fears. We will set a little trap for these fellows, and if they do not come up with a sharp turn, my name ain't Brandon, and I've got no right to all the credit I have received as a detective."

"We might lead them on a chase, Mr. Brandon."

"That is just what I was thinking. You have seen those men who are dogging you?"

"I have."

"Are they Americans?"

"No, sir."

"Did you detect what countrymen they were?"

"I feel assured that they are gypsies."

"What?"

"Gypsies."

"I'll be hanged if they are not new game for me! but we will give these gypsies a lesson in cunning. You go out on the street, make yourself as conspicuous as you can, and if they follow you, lead them out of town to some spot where they may be led to show their hand."

"Will you come with an open front?"

"No."

"How will you cover?"

"Well, you know the old signal?"

"I do."

"You will know me by that."

"How long before you will be ready?"

"Start your run an hour from now."

"Where shall I lead out from?"

"Take clear from the Astor House."

Mrs. Ruthendale, or Lady Kate, as our readers have known her, went forth.

Brandon knew that it was no necessary to go into details with the woman, as she was sharp and shrewd, and both would be compelled to be governed in their actions by developments

The king of the detectives saw through Knight's game.

He had worked all his plans down fine, and one single murder would win him the estate he had been conspiring so long to steal.

A decision was to be rendered in his favor, but at the last moment the widow might appear on the field and block his game again.

One clear murder, and the game was played to a successful issue!

The detective saw that the ruffian would not hesitate at a murder, no matter how great the risk, as it was lose or win on that game.

In a disguise different from any that he had yet assumed, but well calculated for the fine play he had in hand, Brandon slipped out of his office and took his way to the point from whence Lady Kate was to lead the assassins on a "gay" tramp.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### A DEADLY COMBAT IN A CEMETERY.

WHEN Lady Kate had left the detective's rooms, she had proceeded direct to the park, and had wandered around but a few moments, when she observed the two dark-looking men dodging around behind her.

She was not at all nervous, now that she knew that the keen, watchful eyes of Brandon were on the lookout for her.

So much confidence had she in the man who was to protect her, that she was prepared to start on the very minute at the expiration of the hour.

She knew that the king of the detectives was always punctual to the second.

Lady Kate crossed over in front of the Astor House, and took a square start, with the men close at her heels.

Her instructions were to lead them to a lonely place, where they would have an opportunity to open their game.

She walked along Broadway to Grand Street.

The men were following her, but she saw no one who would answer the description of the detective.

An idea struck her; she would invite death where the dead lay.

A Grand Street car was passing, and she entered it.

Fifteen minutes brought her to the Grand Street Ferry.

She passed on to the boat leading to Brooklyn, and, glancing around, feared that she had thrown the assassins off the trail, as she saw nothing of them.

Lady Kate did not wish to go off on a wild-goose chase; and after sitting a few moments in the ladies' cabin, came out on the deck, intending to go ashore.

As she emerged from the cabin, she beheld the two men just passing on board the boat.

She re-entered the cabin and sat down.

The chains were unfastened, and the boat swept out into the river.

Lady Kate had looked around for the man who was to give her the signal.

She saw no one who answered to the appearance of Brandon, even in disguise.

She began to grow nervous, but remembering that Brandon was a man who never failed, she retained her seat.

When the boat arrived on the Brooklyn side she passed out, and entered an East New York car.

After a few seconds the car started, and she saw nothing of the two men.

It was about forty minutes' ride to the place where she had determined to go.

She stopped the car, and, alighting, passed by toward the entrance leading into Evergreen Cemetery.

It was late in the afternoon, and although she was a woman of wonderful nerve, she began to feel shaky again.

She knew that if she entered the cemetery and passed any distance from the entrance, it would be dark before she could regain the thoroughfare.

Arriving within a short distance of the entrance, she stopped and looked back.

She saw two men alighting from a covered wagon. Once glance was sufficient. The assassins were close upon her track, but nowhere was Brandon to be seen.

Her heart failed her. She dared not proceed any further.

Once within the shadow of the lonely cemetery she would be at the mercy of the assassins.

A strong arm, and a hand armed with a

enre, would make but short work of her, a ~~very~~ woman.

She turned to retrace her steps, when suddenly she came face to face with a tall lady dressed in deep mourning and heavily veiled.

The veiled woman passed close to her, and walked on toward the cemetery.

Two hundred feet behind the veiled woman were the two men.

Mrs. Ruthendale stood one moment irresolute, and then moved by a strange courage, turned and walked back toward the cemetery entrance.

It was well on toward sunset, but she walked boldly forward, having evidently made up her mind to see the adventure through to the end.

She struck a winding path, and walked onward until she came to part of the cemetery that was drear and lonely.

She had lost sight for a time of the lady in black, but suddenly beheld her kneeling beside a grave.

Her terror may have returned, and the presence of any one at the moment when such a peril threatened her, appeared better than being alone, and she walked directly toward the woman in black.

It was not out of place for one woman, under the circumstances, to address another, and Mrs. Ruthendale said:

"Have you a relative buried here?"

The woman answered from beneath her veil.

"I have a reason for bending over this grave."

Lady Kate approached nearer the woman in black, and whispered:

"They have followed me."

"I know it. Remain here, and we will see how they show their hands," was the singular answer.

Lady Kate's heart bounded.

She knew that the king of detectives was, according to his usual custom, "on hand."

The two women engaged in conversation, and in a few moments the two dark-faced men drew near.

They stopped near where the two women were standing, and seemed engaged in a consultation.

Occasionally they would point toward the two women, and finally both approached.

Lady Kate had her cue, and paid no attention to them, when one of them stepped directly toward her and said:

"You are my prisoner!"

"Your prisoner?" exclaimed Lady Kate, recoiling.

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"We are officers."

"Show your authority."

The second ruffian advanced and said:

"Don't stand palavering, Brent; fetch her along!"

The woman in black now stepped forward, and in a strange voice, said:

"Gentlemen, this is an outrage!"

"What have you got to say about it?"

"I shall scream for assistance."

"See here, madam: would you interfere with officers in the discharge of their duty?"

"I do not believe that you are officers; you intend some outrage."

"Take your prisoner, Brent!" said one of the men.

Both spoke in broken English.

The man advanced to take hold of Lady Kate, when the woman in black stepped before him.

"Get out of the way!" shouted the man, in a fierce, threatening voice.

"Go off about your business! You are not officers, but two ruffians."

The men looked around in every direction, to see if they were watched, when one of them exclaimed, in a hoarse voice:

"We have no time to lose, Brent; give it to her here!"

"The other witch is in my way."

"Lay her out!"

"Murderers!" exclaimed the woman in black, "what would you?"

"Stand aside!"

"You can not come near this lady."

"Stand aside, I say!"

"Go off!"

"Give it to 'em, Brent; we're losing time!"

The assassin leaped forward, but suddenly he reeled, with a yell, and fell over on the grass, and a second later the other villain lay beside him.

Burt Brandon had unmasked.

Beneath the folds of his dress he had carried a stout "billy," and no man ever walked who could use it with more deadly effect.

The first villain had rolled over and over, and had risen to his feet; but in a moment down he went again, with a second blow from that fearful billy.

The second one also had risen to his feet, and had drawn a pistol; but before he could raise it, Lady Kate had shoved a cocked revolver under his nose, and, in firm tones, she bade him lie down.

The man dropped.

Like all secret assassins, he was a coward.

At this moment Brandon advanced, and gave him a severe tap upon the head.

The men had shown their hands, and had been beaten at their own game.

In a twinkling both had the bracelets on them, and were as harmless as lambs.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ON A STRANGE TRAIL.

HAVING settled the two assassins, the detective rapidly slipped off the lady's gear, and appeared in male toggery.

He had worn the disguise over his ordinary clothes.

Rolling the articles in a bundle, he said:

"You take these, Mrs. Ruthendale, and I will march these two men along."

"Will you hold them?"

"I reckon I will; and they will serve me as good witnesses when I come to have my final accounting with Bayard Knight."

The two men were on their feet, and commenced to beg to be set free.

Brandon laughed in their faces, and ordered them to march.

The men—who were miserable rascals, made all kinds of offers to confess.

Brandon was not quite ready for their confession, and promised a little more "billy" if they did not get along.

At the entrance gate, the detective told Mrs. Ruthendale to go on alone.

"You are safe now," he said, "and will attract too much attention if you remain with me."

It was early in the evening, and Brandon put his prisoners in a car.

A few questions were asked of him; but he knew just how to put off all curious inquiries, and soon had his two prisoners safe and sound in the Tombs.

The day following the incidents related, our hero laid out to pipe the man Bayard Knight.

For two days he hovered around the fellow's home before he caught sight of him.

On the third day he saw his game come forth.

Brandon was on the man's heels.

Night crossed town, and entered a respectable-looking house.

The fellow remained in the house about two hours, and then came forth and returned straight to his own abode.

The detective kept upon his track, heel and toe, until he saw him disappear through his own door.

"I reckon I'll just measure what sort of a shop that is he has just visited," muttered the detective, as he retraced his steps to the house Knight had visited.

It appeared to be a very respectable house, situated in a row of houses that appeared to be occupied by a very honest sort of people.

The detective entered the grocery store on the corner.

The latter was kept by a jolly German.

The groceryman sold liquor on the sly.

The detective speedily "piped" down to that little game, and determined to make it serve his purpose.

He dodged around the corner and disappeared out of sight for a few seconds, and when he reappeared no one would have suspected the miserable-looking tramp to have been the trim-looking old man who had been gazing in the Dutchman's store window a few moments before.

The seeming tramp entered the store and called for a piece of pie, and, after eating it, called for some crackers and cheese.

When he came to pay for what he had eaten, he showed considerable money.

The Dutchman saw the money, and his cunning eyes twinkled. He was evidently amazed

at seeing so much money in possession of such a miserable-looking wretch.

He had been very gruff and short with the supposed tramp; but suddenly his whole manner changed, and he became quite pleasant and talkative.

"You was haf plenty of work dese hard times?"

"Devil a hair's work hev I done these twelve months!"

"Vell, how it was you got so much greenbacks?" and the Dutchman dropped his voice, and spoke in a cunning, confidential tone, as he added. "You was make a leetle strike mit a bank?"

"No, sir," answered the supposed tramp, with great dignity of manner. "Sure I've plenty of money, and I came honestly by it, at that!"

"Was your fadder gone dead?"

"No, sir."

"Den it was your mudder?"

"No, sir."

"Your brudder, eh?"

"No."

"Vell, how was it you was so rich all mit a sudden?"

"Would ye loike ter know?"

"Oh, no; it was none of mine business."

"Begorra, but I'd just as lief tell ye!"

"Oh, never mind; it was your own business."

"Well, now, I'll let ye into a secret. I'm Asthor in disguise, and I'm just takin' a walk around to see how the tenants are gettin' along these foine days."

The Dutchman laughed, and asked the tramp to have something to drink.

"To drink! Why I thought this was a grocery store!"

"Vell, so it was; but, you know, I always keep a bottle ven I haf distinguished mes come to see me mit a disguise."

"Well, ye appear to be a very nice mon, and I don't mind if I take a wee drrop wid ye."

The Dutchman led the detective to the rear part of the store and opening a cedar chest drew forth a bottle.

Unfortunately for the poor there are too many of those cheats around grocery stores.

The Dutchman meant business.

His cupidity was aroused by the sight of the seeming tramp's money.

He concluded as a matter of course, the money had been stolen, and knew well that stolen money went freely.

He had no conscientious scruples, being willing to gobble all the greenbacks that he could.

The customer pretended to drink off his liquor, and, smacking his lips, exclaimed:

"Begorra, that's good! And, as ye are a nice sort of man, suppose ye have another wid me?"

The Dutchman's eyes glittered with a cunning delight.

He had made up his mind to have a good share of that money before his customer got away.

They had a second drink, the tramp once more displaying his money.

Again the Dutchman said:

"You was make a big strike, anyhow, somewhere."

"No, no, Dutchy. I know ye are astonished to see me wid so much money, but I'll just relieve your anxiety. It's me sister's money, that's livin' wid the people over there in 429."

"Vat! you haf got a sister dot lifs ofer in 429?"

"Yes, I have."

A strange look came over the German's face, and reaching over the counter, he whispered in the detective's ear:

"Say, mine friendt, was you know all about dot house, 429?"

"Well, no; me sister took service there about a month ago, and to-day was the first time I called to see her."

"Was your sister a square girl?"

"Begorra, I'll make yer nose flat to yer cheek if ye would dare say she was not!"

"Vell, den, mine friendt, I was dell you some dings;" and the Dutchman assumed a very mysterious air.

"What would ye tell me?"

"Vell, you had better look out."

"Look out for what?"

"Dot house ofer dere vare you sister was liffin'."

"What do ye mane?"

"Vell, now, dere was somedings strange about dot house."

"Come and have another dhrink," said the tramp; "ye've given me quite a fright."

"Vell, ef your sister vas a nice girl, it vas better dot you got her ould mit dot house."

"Come on, now; spake out just what ye name."

"Vell, dere vas bad tings said mit dot house."

"Well, what is said?"

"You would not gif me away?"

"Not a bit!"

"Vell, I dell you somedings. About dree weeks ago, one night, I vas hal some irfrends dot stay in mine store very late."

"Well?"

"And ven dey vas gone home, I goes mit dem der corner."

"Well?"

"Ven I vas comin' pack, shust as I vas op-posite 429, dere vas a carriage come up mit der door."

"That was not strange, was it?"

"Vell, it vas after twelve o'clock, and it vas not mooth aboudi der carriage; but dere vas a scream dot comes ould mit der carriage, and I know dot it vas a woman dot make der scream."

"How do ye know it was a woman?"

"Vell, I vas know by de voice; and den I know somedingsawful, but I nefer says nutting about it."

"What did ye see?"

"Vell, I vas dell you. It vas a handsome young girl, and it vas shust awful!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BRANDON AND KNIGHT TAKE ANOTHER TILT.

BRANDON was on the alert now.

At last he had tracked Bayard Knight down to where he had concealed his victim.

The detective had wonderful command of his countenance, however, and acted his part well.

He betrayed no excitement, but only showed the ordinary curiosity that might be exhibited by a man of his pretended condition.

In an off-hand manner he said:

"Oh, begorra! that wasn't nothing strange; shure thin things often happen among the big vays."

"Yes, dot vos all right; but den I dell yer dis wer' somedings else—somedings wer' de fatter mit dot gal more as vot you vos tinks."

"Oh, mabbe she had been to a ball and was overcome wid the dancin'; I've often seen that mesel."

"Ahl dot vos all right; but hole on, ven I dell you dot youngs lady made a fight mit dose tellers ven dey vos carrying her up der stoop, beh? Vot you tink mit dot? It vos no fatigue, or vot you call him."

"She struggled wid 'em?"

"Yes, she did; and one of de mens had a mask—or vot you call him?—ofer his face, and he vos de man—he put his hand ofer de young gal so close so dot she can't holler no more."

"And did they take her into the house?"

"You can shust bet dot dey took her into der house; and shust vonce I saw dot gal's face, and she vos young and a most beautiful gal vot as I efer saw; and all I vos sorry mit dot gal she shust look so awful like she vos frightened al otter mit death."

"Well, give us another drink, Dutchy, and I must be goin'."

"All right; but let me dell you dot of your sister vos in dot house, it vos better as you got her ould, dot vos all."

Brandon paid for what refreshment he had had and left the store, leaving the Dutchman much disappointed because he had failed in making a big hole in the roll of money.

Brandon had learned some important facts, but it was still necessary that he should proceed in a very cautious manner. He had been unable to discover the real character of the house, although he had his suspicions. He went direct about getting the necessary information. A few moments after the scene in the grocery store, a rough-looking tramp knocked at the basement door of the house No. 429. The door was opened by a smart-looking Irish girl.

"Have ye a bit for a poor man to ate?" asked the tramp.

"Oh, go 'long, it's nothing but running to this door every five minutes to attend to some such chaps as you! Faith, yees are worse than yees; yet always eating!" answered the girl, making a move to slam the door in the seeming beggar's face.

In a voice of real earnestness, the tramp said:

"For the love of Heaven, don't be after shutin' the door on me, I'm starvin', indade!"

"Troth, that's what they all say!"

"Well, it's the truth I'm tellin' ye. I never begged afore in me life; but it's a long tramp I've had this blessed day!"

"And they all say that, too!"

"Well, may I never call down bad luck on yer head for drivin' a hungry man from your door!"

"Is it real hungry ye are?"

"I am, indade, or I wouldn't be standin' here beggin' from such a hard-hearted craythur as ye are!"

The girl couldn't stand to be called hard-hearted, and she said:

"Well, just wait a minute; sure ye may really be in nade, and I'm not the one to drive an honest, hungry man from the door."

The girl went back to the kitchen, and returned in a few moments with a large piece of bread.

The tramp commenced eating, and the girl became convinced that he was really an honest poor fellow.

"Would ye have a cup of could tay?" she asked.

"Faith, it would make me happy as a lord!"

"Well, come in and I'll just make ye happy, sechin' ye are an honest man and in real nade."

The tramp winked at an imaginary friend as he followed the good-natured servant into the kitchen, and in a few moments he was engaged in a pleasant conversation with her.

It is the weakness of servant-girls to talk a great deal when they once get started, and especially when they have a fancied grievance against their mistress.

The girl was soon opening her heart to her guest.

She told how she had been in the house two months, that the pay was good, but there was something queer about the people.

"Shure, it's a boardin'-house I was told."

"Well, it is, but it's strange boarders they have here, shure."

"An' ain't it alsy for ye to know what is goin' on?"

"Faith, there's one room in the house no one enthers; it is said that it's a crazy woman they have kept there—a sister to the lady as kapes the house."

"Did ye ever see the crazy woman?"

"Divil a glimpse ov her did I ever have, or any one else in the house; shure she was brought here from the asylum one night, and she's been kept close in the room ever since, the mistris' bein' the only one who has ever brought food to her."

"An' ye say it is a regular boardin'-house?"

"Av coarse."

"Any one can get board here?"

"Av coarse, it tiey are respectable. Shure, there's nothing agin the house only the mystery ov the crazy woman above there."

"And ye don't know whether it is a young woman or an old one?"

"Faith, there's no one in the house ever saw hide or hair ov her."

Brandon had gathered all he wanted, and thanking the kind-hearted girl, got out of the house.

He felt assured that he had run Knight to earth.

He had an idea that he knew well enough who the mysterious crazy woman was, and he was determined to solve the mystery of that room, where no one entered but the landlady.

The detective was just passing from the basement door, when a man came out of the upper hall-door.

One glance was sufficient.

It was Bayard Knight.

Brandon was puzzled.

Not two hours previously he had shadowed Bayard Knight to his own home, and here he was coming once more from the same house he had been shadowed from.

The detective, for once, was at a loss to account for so singular a circumstance.

To another man it might have appeared as a commonplace and ordinary occurrence.

There was really nothing strange about a man returning to a house he had just left, but to the detective it suggested an idea.

He at once hit upon a little expedient to solve the mystery.

He walked away from the house in a slow and deliberate manner, and soon observed that Knight was heading in the same direction.

At the corner of the street the detective saw two men.

He passed near them, and at a glance recognized them as two of the men who had been with the gang who had forced the young man, Charley Brighton, to sign the false acceptance on the check.

"Ah, hal" muttered Brandon; "I reckon this young smelis a mouse. Well, well, come along, gentlemen. We will play a nice little game of hide and seek, and if I don't get the brace on you, why, call me a 'duster,' that's all!"

The detective turned down a side street, and after walking a little way, saw that the two men were on his track, but he could see nothing of the fellow Bayard Knight.

"Ahal that's the game you're working, eh?" laughed the jolly detective, as he sauntered along, still retaining in his manner the assumed character of a poor tramp.

"That chap, Bayard Knight, is a sharp one, after all," soliloquized the detective. "He dropped to my disguise when I was shadowing him first, and has turned the tables on me."

The detective walked on a short distance further, and still saw that the two men were upon his track.

The game was an open one. Bayard Knight did not know that the detective had even seen the two men.

It was evident the schemer had known that the two men were at his house, and when he discovered that he was being shadowed, he had returned and secured their services to track the detective, and beat him at his own game.

This was the theory of Brandon, and he had hit upon the right one, as Bayard Knight had worked his cards with the two villains by telling them that the man was the one who was on their track on the little check game.

"Kill him!" said Knight to these men, "and your road is clear."

"Point him out to us and we will give the undertaker a chance!" was the reply.

Thus it was that the two men were really on Brandon's track, intending to lay him out as their supposed Nemesis, when, in reality, they were only doing the job (in case they succeeded) for Knight.

It was not the first time that Brandon had had a brace of forgers and desperadoes on his track with the intention of assassinating him.

He was forewarned, however, and would not have cared if there had been a dozen instead of two of them.

Knight had told the men it was the "cop" who was "heeling" them. He did not tell them that the man was Brandon. The fellows knew Brandon too well to have ever attempted to lay him out.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### FINE PLAY BETWEEN FOUR SHARP MEN.

So little did the detective care for these ferocious villains who were seeking his life, that he made up his mind to take a course that would give them a fair chance to open their little game.

He was well armed and prepared for any emergency.

He took it leisurely down town, and at length entered a certain resort where thieves and bad characters of the most dangerous description were wont to congregate.

The man who kept the house, was a "fence," a receiver of stolen goods, but in mortal dread of the detectives, and frequently gave men away when he saw no chance to get away with their "swag." By this playing double with both thieves and detectives, he was able to go through with quite a number of little games successfully.

Brandon had this man down fine, and there was no man in New York whom Tom Curley more dreaded and feared, than he did the king of the detectives.

Brandon was the only man with whom he would not have dared to play any tricks.

The detective had doubled two or three times on the men who were dogging him, when a most singular incident occurred.

Our hero had just turned a corner, and was passing through the glare of a corner grogery, when he came face to face with the would-be assassins.

There was nothing startling in that fact, were it not that, just as he had passed them, he ran bang against another man.

The man whom he had run against was a green-looking Dutchman, and yet quick as lightning he dealt the pretended tramp a blow that sent him reeling into the gutter.

Burt Brandon would have set in as

Dutchman, but his quick eye had penetrated a mystery.

The Dutchman was some fellow in disguise.

Brandon advanced toward him, so the Dutchman exclaimed:

" You must go off mit yourself or I will sendt you flying von't laid ofter your heels!"

" Would ye now, Dutchy? Be gorna, but it's mesel' that has a moind ter take ye up in me arums and carry ye down to the river and duck ye, for the blow ye wet' affer givin' me."

" You vos duck me, eh?"

" Well, I have half a moind to duck ye."

The Dutchman went down in his clothes and drew forth a pistol, and, raising it to a level, asked:

" How vos dot, Irish?"

The pretended tramp advanced close to the Dutchman, and said:

" You're no good!"

The Dutchman suddenly "dropped," and exclaimed in turn:

" Brandon!"

" Ay, ay, Kepler, my lad, you're got up neat, but I trained you at a glance."

" I'll be hanged if you didn't blind me!"

" What's your lay?"

" The check-raisers."

" You're 'piping' them down?"

" You bet!"

" They're trailing me to lay me out."

The two detectives had remained together as long as they dared, as they knew that the two forgers might drop to them at any moment.

It was a double "pipe" all round, but the two detectives had the inside track.

" What's your lead?" asked Kepler.

" I'll turn up on the sailor lay at Tom Curley's; drop in."

" All right, my hunkey; I'll be with you."

During the whole time that the two detectives had been talking, they had been acting a pantomime as though they were disputing; and when they separated they both understood their game as closely and minutely as though they had exchanged all the details with each other.

It will be necessary to explain that the two forgers had "dropped" on the accepted "check" racket; but as there had been a clear "sneak" bond robbery committed, Kepler had an idea that they were the perpetrators, and he was "boiling" them down for that "fat."

They had also made several attempts to lay out Charley Brighton, as they held him as a scoundler on the check job.

Quite a heavy haul had been made on the "bold sneak pull," and it was only a faint suspicion on Kepler's part that they were in on that "brace."

The two forgers had watched the progress of the play between the two detectives; and although they had Brandon "boiled down," they hadn't Kepler on the fire at all, and supposed that he was merely some high-tempered Dutchy, and laughed in their sleeves at the manner in which the pretended tramp had been laid out.

It was a mystery to them why the detective did not get back at the Dutchman, but that little mystery was to be opened to them in a most remarkable manner before the night passed.

Brandon kept up his way, and had the satisfaction of seeing that the two forgers were upon his track.

They were out for a clean sweep, but, unconsciously, were running straight into a hole.

They were sharp, desperate men, but were playing against a man much sharper than they were.

Brandon struck Tom Curley's place, a low-celled bar-room, with many rear rooms, where many a scheme of robbery was concerted, and where many a lot of "swag" was divided.

As the detective passed in, he saw Tom Curley behind the bar.

It took but two words to give the "fence" rascal his cue, and Brandon dodged into a rear room.

In less than two seconds he reappeared in the bar-room, having made a most wonderful and astonishing transformation in his appearance.

As the two forgers entered the place they saw a sailor, a rough and ready sort of chap, leaning over the bar and talking to Curley.

The two forgers were well known to Curley, and under ordinary circumstances he would not have played against them, but while Brandon was the man who was on the shadow, Tom Curley dared not "squeak."

That wonderfully patient and tireless thief-scatcher held the "fence" rascal dead paralyzed.

As the two forgers entered the room they stepped up to the bar, and gave Curley a sly

signal, and asked him a few questions in a whisper.

The purport of their questions was concerning the tramp who had entered just ahead of them.

" He was a 'cop' sailing in under close reef."

" We know that! Where is he?"

" He slid upstairs to take a snooze; he's been on a 'night hawker'!"

" Where's his room?"

" What's yer lay?"

" He's running us close in."

" Well, all right, gentlemen, I'm with yer; but yer can't get me in no dead racket."

" You ain't going to back-cap us, are you, Curley?"

" Well, I'd just like to hear any one put up for me on that; but yer know yourselves it's no show for me if I let yer in on that man when he's run in here for shelter! D-n yes, I've got to look out for mesel'!"

" How long will he lay over?"

" Make versels aisy around here, yer will be time enough for him when he sails again; yer kin bet he's only in for short anchor."

The meaning of the dialogue between the two men was, that Curley didn't care to have any points played on his premises under the circumstances, but that they could work their charm as soon as the detective had left his house.

The two men were compelled to be satisfied with that arrangement.

In the meantime, Curley, who, as our readers well know, was tossing them off the scent, played another card against them, and in favor of Brandon, by saying:

" There's yer game, my covies," and he nodded toward the detective.

" Who's he?"

" A broker from Wall Street, full of the queer, got up to see underground life in New York; he's sharp, but fresh."

The men exchanged glances, and made up their minds to go for the broker.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### LADY KATE SETS IN FOR A LEAD.

The sailor invited them on by displaying a large roll of bills.

Tom Curley took the liberty of introducing the two forgers to the pretended broker, as two friends of his, gentlemen who, like himself, liked sport once in a while.

The party were taking their cigars and were getting along very nicely toward an acquaintance, when the door opened and another sailor, seemingly of the better class, entered the bar-room.

The last comer asked all hands to drink, and, pretending to be a little under the influence, proclaimed himself captain of a fruiting bark.

All hands were soon engaged in a lively talk, when the broker suggested a toss of the bones.

One of the forgers exchanged a significant signal with Curley, and proposed that the party sit down to a quiet game of cards.

The game commenced, and a supposed doctor's bottle was brought upon the table.

The broker and the sea-captain both appeared to drink freely, and began to show signs of sleepiness.

At length the sea-captain went clear off to the land of Nod, and a few moments later the broker also dozed off.

The time had come for the forgers to act.

One of them slipped his hand into the sleeping broker's pocket to extract the roll of bills that had fallen under his avaricious gaze.

At that moment the sea-captain appeared to wake suddenly, and seeing what was going on, exclaimed:

" Hold on there, shipmate, you're getting into the money 'bunker!'"

The other forger suddenly drew a cocked revolver from his pocket, and slipping it under the sea-captain's nose, said, in a fierce tone:

" See here, old salt-head, just keep quiet, or you'll never be drowned."

" Would you murder me?"

" If you don't close your lip-scuppers, I'll kill you dead, sure!"

The sea-captain suddenly reached forward and grasped the fellow's wrist and turned it down, at the same time the pistol was discharged and the bullet imbedded in the floor.

" Dang you!" cried the forger, springing to his feet, and he grappled with the sea-captain.

The broker also had become aroused, when the other forger bid him keep still, as he attempted to shove a pistol under his nose.

Brandon, however, was on the alert for the movement, and a struggle commenced between the other two men.

Both were but brief struggles.

The two detectives handled the two forgers as though they had been children.

One of them saw that a game was being worked on them at the first show of resistance, and had yelled for Curley.

That gentleman did not choose to hear the summons, and in a few seconds the two forgers were handcuffed and seated at the table, as helpless as two lambs, and feeling as simple as two foolish school-children.

In the meantime, Kepler had commenced going through them, and had already secured evidence that he had sprung the right lead, and that the two men really were in the sneak-bond racket.

It was a queer sight as the two detectives, with comical smiles upon their faces, sat and looked at their game.

" You got us dead, gentlemen," said one of the forgers.

" A pair of nice plums!" said Brandon, in a satirical tone.

" What are you taking us on, gentlemen?"

" So you are the lads Bayard Knight set on to lay me out, eh?"

" Who in thunder are you, anyhow?" blurted out one of the forgers.

" They call me Bert Brandon."

" The devil!" exclaimed both men.

" And who in thunder were we dogging?"

" You were dogging me, gentlemen, and if friend Kepler here did not want you on another little matter, I'd let you go free, so that you might play in again with Knight."

" Knight be hanged! We've got no lay in with him."

" Ah! you only had a little 'lay-out' for me, then?"

" No, sir."

" Oh, no."

" We would have known better than to try and play against you, Brandon."

" Thank you, gentlemen, but it happens that if I hadn't been Brandon, I might have been the victim of a very sad mistake, and you two puppets would have felt very bad about it, wouldn't you?"

The forgers knew that their little game was all gone in.

They counted themselves the two smartest workers in New York, and they had been caught as simply as two rural lambs.

Kepler marched his men off.

He had long been on their track, as he knew what dangerous men they were, and at last he had caught them. He had literally run them clean down, and had a sure "send up" on them.

The forgers offered big terms to be let off, but it was like beating the wind with their hands to offer money to two such men as Kepler and Brandon.

The day following the incidents we have related, our hero set up a job to solve the mystery of No. 429.

A message brought Lady Kate to his office.

Fortune favored him in his designs.

In the "Herald" he found an advertisement for board at the house he was "piping."

Lady Kate arrived in due time, and the detective opened his scheme to her.

Mrs. Ruthendale was greatly excited when she learned the possibility that her daughter was the supposed crazy young lady said to be confined in that house.

Lady Kate was good on disguises, and within two hours from the time that she had held her talk with the king of the detectives, an old lady, very feeble and very deaf, called at No. 429 in search of board.

Terms were made, and she secured a room, and the same night arrived at the house with her traps.

At the first table Lady Kate learned that she was in a peculiar sort of house.

The boarders were an ordinary class of people, but Mrs. Wharton, the woman who kept the house, was a character.

She was a blond woman, extremely courteous and pleasant in her demeanor; in fact, too soft and cat-like to be honest.

She showed her new boarder every attention, and Lady Kate played well her part until the meal was about half over, when a startling incident occurred.

Bayard Knight, her most bitter foe—the man who had robbed her of her child—who had hired assassins to murder her and was bad

robbed her of her fortune—entered the room, and was assigned a seat right beside her at the table.

Lady Kate was a brave woman, and, under the most trying circumstances, was capable of displaying extraordinary nerve; but the near presence of this deadly enemy nearly unnerved her.

It required a most wonderful self-command to keep from screaming outright with terror.

She feared Bayard Knight as she did no other living mortal.

The man had not been beside her two minutes before she discovered that he was watching her with tiger-like interest.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### IN THE DEATH-CHAMBER.

AFTER Lady Kate had left the room, Bayard Knight asked in an excited manner of Mrs. Wharton:

"Who is that woman?"

"A new boarder."

"A new boarder, eh?"

"Yes."

"When did she come here?"

"To-day."

"What do you know about her?"

"Nothing."

Bayard Knight said nothing more, and left the room.

In the meantime Lady Kate had taken the bearings of the house, and learned in what room the crazy girl was confined.

Her anxiety urged her to bring matters to a head, and she determined that very night to gain admission to that room, even if she were compelled to do so pistol in hand.

Even her fear of Bayard Knight did not lessen her resolution.

Little did the brave woman dream of the horrors that fearful night was to reveal.

Mrs. Ruthendale knew that danger overhung every step, but she was risking all for that child who had been so long separated from her.

She was determined to gain an entrance into that mysterious room where the pretended crazy girl was supposed to be confined.

She sat in her room, waiting for the hours to pass until all in the house had retired.

At length she began making her preparations. She still preserved her incognito of an old woman, but placed about her clothing a pair of small revolvers.

She was a determined woman, who had learned the use of the weapons which she was hiding upon her person to use in case of emergency.

Upon her feet she slipped a pair of moccasins, and when all was ready, with a small masked lantern in her hand, she stole forth from her room with the noiseless tread of a cat.

Down the stairs she moved, and a few minutes later stood before the door of the mysterious room.

All was still within—solemnly still, so that a strange terror began to thrill that brave woman's heart.

From her pocket she drew a skeleton key, and was just upon the point of thrusting it in the door, when she heard a step as though one were descending the stairs.

The woman ran along the hall, and took a position by the basement stairs, and strained her ears to listen.

She had not been deceived.

Some one descended the stairs, moved stealthily toward the front door, opened it, and passed out.

Lady Kate returned to the invalid's room. She determined to act boldly and quickly.

Well did she know how to open the door, and in an instant she stood within the room.

She passed the middle of the floor, and stopped and listened.

All was still.

The idea crossed her mind that she must have made a mistake, and had got into the wrong room.

She slid the mask of her lantern, and let the sharp ray of light move around the room, as she swayed her hand to and fro.

Suddenly an appalling sight met her gaze. The awful, solemn stillness was explained.

Not six feet from her, resting on an undertaker's two horses, was a coffin, covered with a black pall.

The woman staggered, as a rush of blood suffused for an instant her brain.

Within that brief moment a world of thought flashed through her mind.

She believed that her enemy had triumphed.

That he had accomplished his fearful work.

It was some moments before she had regained sufficient strength to think calmly.

Under ordinary circumstances she would have fallen senseless to the floor.

She moved toward the coffin with trembling step, and reached forward to remove the pall.

A sound fell upon her ear.

Quick as a flash she slid her lantern mask, and stood and listened.

All was still.

Again she reached forth her hand, and pulled the pall from the coffin, and as its folds fell to the floor, something else came with it, causing quite a noise.

Once more she stopped and listened, and concluding all was right, she slid her lantern mask, and again guided the ray of light along the coffin.

The head-piece was screwed down.

The woman, although almost paralyzed with awe and terror, drew a small chisel from her pocket—an article she had brought along for another purpose—and commenced undoing the screws.

Again she heard a strange noise, and stopped.

She looked at the moment much like a corpse herself.

She felt almost certain that some one was in the room, and determined to make a search.

She moved about the room, which was spacious, but could see no signs of the presence of any one.

Again she returned beside the coffin, and succeeded at length in raising the head-lid.

The coffin was empty.

With a low, suppressed cry, she started back, when a form rose before her.

She would have screamed, but she could not; her tongue was powerless to utter a single cry.

"We have met at last, Mrs. Ruthendale."

The speaker was Bayard Knight.

A fierce look of malignant triumph gleamed in his eyes as he glared upon the disguised woman.

The tones of the man's voice restored the woman, and, in a calm voice she asked:

"Who are you?"

"Oh! you do not know, eh?"

"Who are you?" I ask.

"Ha, ha! I was keener than you. I recognized you the moment I set eyes on you, and I am right glad that we have met!"

"You have no right in this room."

"Pray, what right have you here?"

"Begone, sir!"

"Well, you are cool!"

"I shall scream for assistance!"

"Do so, and I will see how well you can play out your game; but come, come, I want to talk to you—drop your mask."

"Who are you?"

"You really do not remember me, eh?"

"I demand to know who you are?"

"Well, I am known around here as Bayard Knight; come, Mrs. Ruthendale, I will be more frank with you than you appear to be willing to be with me."

Lady Kate saw that it was useless to attempt to conceal her identity, and said:

"What do you here, Bayard Knight?"

"I was going to ask you that question."

"Courtesy demands an answer to mine first."

"And you want to know what I am doing here?"

"I—"

"Do you see yonder coffin?"

"Yes"

"Do you know what it is here for?"

"I do not."

"I will tell you."

"I listen."

"It was brought here to be filled."

"Cruel, inhuman monster, would you torture me?"

Mrs. Ruthendale little dreamed of the answer she was to receive.

She was under the impression that the man would say that it was intended for the body of her daughter.

His answer caused her blood to run cold as she truly realized what a desperate and daring man he was.

"That coffin," he said, "was brought in here since supper-time."

"For what purpose, I ask?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I can not."

"It was brought in here after I recognized you."

An idea of his meaning flashed through her mind, and she asked:

"What mean you, monster?"

"I mean that when you leave this house, it will be in that coffin!"

"Would you murder me?"

"That depends upon circumstances."

"I defy you!"

"Ah! I don't mind defiance just now, but there is one way in which you can save your life."

"I do not fear you! I will scream for help!"

"The moment you attempt to scream, I will smother you."

"Do not approach me!"

"It is not necessary; look behind you, and you will see that I have laid my plans well."

Instinctively Mrs. Ruthendale turned her head.

She had been tricked; Bayard Knight leaped forward and seized her by the throat.

She struggled to free herself—but was in the grasp of a powerful man.

In the struggle they fell against the coffin, which was tipped over upon the floor, but the woman was overcome.

The wretch who had assailed her had forced a gag into her mouth, after driving her into temporary insensibility by aid of a handkerchief saturated with chloroform.

When the woman came out of the effect of the anesthetic, she found herself gagged and handcuffed, and as securely bound as a criminal being led to the gallows.

Bayard Knight raised his victim to a sitting position on the coffin, and, stepping back, stood and contemplated her with a demoniac expression of satisfaction upon his wicked face.

"We have played a deep game, madam, against each other, but I am the winner in the end, as I knew I should be."

His poor victim could make no reply.

She merely returned his wicked gaze of triumph with a look of unutterable agony and hopelessness.

The man drew a rope from his pocket, and held it before her gaze.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### A SCENE ACROSS A COFFIN.

THERE was a terrible significance in the showing of that rope.

The assassin, however, did not wait for her to draw any conclusion. In a hard, cruel voice, he said:

"I mean to use this rope for a noiseless execution. You are in my way, and I shall strangle you!"

The woman believed that he meant every word that he said.

She had every reason to know that he was fierce and cruel enough to make good his terrible threat.

"I will spare your life on one condition," he added. "If you will not assent to my proposition you will be carried from this room in that coffin."

The woman swayed her head to and fro in a spirit of bitterness, but was compelled to keep silent.

"You can answer my questions with signs," he said.

She understood him, and nodded affirmatively.

"Will you sign certain papers?"

She nodded negatively.

"You refuse?"

She nodded:

"Yes."

The man laughed in a low, fiendish manner, and held aloft the rope.

The woman had made up her mind to die, to be strangled to death in that room, but she was determined not to yield. She won't die before she would aid him in any way to rob her child.

"You are an honorable woman," he said; "will you swear not to scream if I remove the gag?"

She nodded negatively.

"You defy me?"

She nodded:

"Yes."

The man's face began to show signs of the furious passion raging in his soul.

He deliberately formed the rope into a noose before her eyes, and threw the slip-noose over her head.

She felt that her hour had come.

He had her at his mercy, and he was not a man who ever experienced the quality of mercy.

"If you sign the papers, I will have no object in taking your life. If you do not sign them, I will kill you; and, as far as I am concerned, that will answer the same purpose. Will you sign?"

The woman shook her head.

"No."

The wretch seized the rope, and drew it close to her tender throat.

"Will you sign?"

She shook her head.

"No."

The man drew it tighter, until she began to strangle.

"Will you sign?"

Feebly she shook her head.

"No."

"Then, by Heaven, you die!" and he made as though to draw the rope tightly, when a most extraordinary incident occurred.

A third party suddenly appeared in the room. A cocked pistol was leveled at Bayard Knight's heart, and a cool, firm voice said:

"You scoundrel, let go of that rope!"

Bayard Knight would have given the rope a pull, but a strong hand knocked him to his knees.

In an instant the new-comer had removed the gag from Mrs. Ruthendale's mouth, and torn the rope from over her neck.

Bayard Knight had risen to his feet.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Don't you know, villain?"

"Brandon?"

"Well, I am Brandon for you."

"Once again you have crossed my path!"

"Yes, villain; and some day I will cross your path for the last time!"

"I know you will!" hissed Knight.

"For reasons of my own, I will allow you to sneak out of this house; otherwise I would give you an excursion up the river for this night's work!"

"Arrest me if you dare!"

"If I dare?"

"Yes."

"By thunder, if you don't make yourself scarce, I will fit you into yonder coffin!"

"You dare not!"

"Well, let it be so," and Brandon leaped forward.

Knight raised a pistol, and would have fired, but he was dealing with a man who was simply old lightning.

The pistol was wrenched from his grasp, and Brandon dealt him a powerful blow on the head.

Bayard Knight fell to the floor.

The detective raised his arm, as though to strike him again, when Mrs. Ruthendale stepped forward, placed one hand on his arm, and whispered something in his ear:

"You're right," answered Brandon, and he added: "Come, we will go out of this house, and thank Heaven I entered it just in time!"

"You came just in time to save my life."

"Yes; I thought it possible something might turn up, and I always like to be on hand."

"How did you know just where to come?" asked Mrs. Ruthendale, as she and the detective moved toward the room door.

"I have been 'piping' you for the last half hour. I followed that villain into the room."

"And why did you not make your presence known sooner?"

"I was in hopes that the scoundrel might give himself away."

Burt Brandon could have arrested Bayard Knight, but that was not a part of his game until Renie had been recovered.

He felt assured that she was in the power of the villain, and he was satisfied that sooner or later he would rescue her.

They passed to the door, and were soon on the street, when Mrs. Ruthendale related all that had occurred.

The detective listened to her recital, and when she had concluded, remarked:

"It is evident that Knight recognized you, despite your disguise the moment you entered that house."

"He must have doac so."

"Wh'e' Es since occurred proves that we are on the right track; he has removed his captive the moment he discovered you were in the house."

"But why had they that coffin there?"

"Wh'i that was to act in a scenic effect on Knight thought to frighten you."

"Had you not arrived just as you did, he would have killed me."

"I guess not."

"I know he would have killed me."

"Well, I thought it just as well to be on hand, in case of accident, and I was there."

"I fear they have killed Renie!"

"You need have no fear."

"That coffin!"

"Oh! that amounts to nothing. They dare not kill her."

"But she may have died. They may have worried her to death."

"No; if she were dead, Knight would not have closed in on you so fine."

"Yes, he would, because I would be the only obstacle then between him and the great fortune he has been striving to obtain."

The day following the scenes above described, Brandon was on the lay for Bayard Knight. Matters were getting down to a fire point.

He was satisfied that Renie was the crazy girl who had been concealed in the house No. 429, and that she had been spirited away to some other hiding-place.

Had he felt sure at the time, instead of sending Mrs. Ruthendale into that house, he would have gone himself; and he was determined to take the matter in his own hands the next time he had a good clew.

He felt satisfied, also, that it was necessary for him to adopt some entirely new disguise.

He thought the matter over, and at length hit upon a disguise that he felt assured even the sharp-witted Bayard Knight could not penetrate.

The detective had been shadowing Bayard Knight's house for over six hours, and had seen nothing of the fellow.

At length he got an intimation that the man was not at home, and concluded to tramp over to 429, and shadow there a while.

He had reached Broadway, and was crossing the street, when he saw a green-looking Dutchman talking with a coachman.

The detective might have passed on, paying no attention to the fellow, had he not suddenly turned and walked away.

"Ah, ha!" muttered Brandon; "I have got you now, my covey!"

Bayard Knight could disguise his person, but he could not change his walk.

The moment he stepped away from beside the coach, our hero "dropped" to him, even in his disguise.

Knight started up Broadway, and the detective struck the trail to follow.

Brandon felt assured that already he was about to run his man down.

He had accumulated all the evidence that he required to kill the fellow off in his one grand scheme, and now he was only waiting to rescue Renie.

Knight walked very slow, and appeared to be himself on the lookout for some one.

"I reckon he is on a sort of shadow game himself," was Brandon's muttered remark as he followed the man up the street.

The little game of dog was kept up for two whole hours, until at length Bayard Knight led the way to an obscure neighborhood, and stopped before a tenement-house.

He walked back and forth before the house two or three times, watching one of the windows.

At length he made a signal, and a few moments later a woman came forth.

The woman was dressed like a Dutch girl.

The detective caught a clear glance of her face, but was forced to the conclusion that he had never seen her before.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### ON A SURE TRAIL AT LAST.

KNIGHT and the woman conversed for a few moments, and then started together up the street.

They had just turned a corner when a coach came along.

Brandon glanced at the driver and recognized him as the same with whom he had seen Knight talking when he first dropped to him in his present disguise.

The detective hailed the coach.

The fellow would have driven on, when Brandon made a spring and climbed up on the seat beside him.

"What in thunder do you mean coming up here, you Dutch rascal?"

"Well, it was better dot you stop de next time, ven I let you know dot I vas like to speak mit you."

The driver brought his horses to a stand, and with an oath exclaimed:

"Hang you! get off the box, or I'll throw you off!"

A smile swept over the detective's face.

Fortune favored him.

He recognized the driver as a man whom he had arrested once for a petty crime.

"Get off!" exclaimed the coachman.

The detective showed the muzzle of a pistol, and said in his natural voice:

"Drive on, 'Wax,' I am on a 'lay,' and if you don't fall in with me, I'll have you ride me around to headquarters."

The driver gave a low, meaning whistle, and said:

"Oh, I see! That's the racket, is it?"

"Yes, my man; that's the racket."

"I'll be hanged if you ain't got up well!"

"Yes."

"Who are you? I don't know you, any-how."

"You may call me Brandon."

The driver became meek as a lamb.

"What can I do?"

"Commence to drive on slowly, and I will tell you."

The driver started his horses.

"You are engaged to meet a man somewhere around here?"

"Yes; two blocks from here."

"The man you are to meet is the fellow I am 'piping'."

"Who is he?"

"Well, I reckon it don't make much odds to you; but I want to ride with you, and you must play in for me."

"All right, I'm your man."

The driver whipped up his horses, turned the corner of a street, and there stood the pretended Dutch couple.

The carriage was stopped near them.

It was just dark, and a lonely neighborhood.

Bayard Knight noticed the man beside the driver, and asked:

"Whom have you got up there with you?"

The driver proved himself a witty chap. He answered quickly:

"My time's up; I'm off for the night; this man will drive instead of me. I only run the carriage in the daytime."

"Who are you?" asked Knight, addressing the new driver.

"What difference is it to ye who I am? Faith, it's a queer sort of an old man ye are whin yer so over particular."

The woman who was with Knight said to him in a low tone:

"There is something strange about this change of drivers."

"I guess it's all right," answered Knight, adding; "besides we have not got much time to spare."

"Suppose it is Brandon?" whispered the woman.

Knight turned pale.

He knew that the detective was seemingly omnipresent.

An idea struck him.

"You get in the coach," he said.

"What will you do?"

"It will be all right. I will fool that Brandon just once."

"Where shall I have the coach driven?"

"To No. 429."

This conversation was carried on in a low whisper, so that Brandon could not overhear one word that was said.

The woman got in the coach, and Knight said.

"Well, I suppose it is all right; you know where to go; drive on."

Brandon was bothered.

It was evident that the man and woman were about to separate.

He asked the driver where he was to drive.

The coachman mentioned the house No. 429.

The detective was nonplussed.

It might be that, by trailing the woman, he would be all right, and then again it might be all wrong.

He determined to keep on the man's track.

The coach was driven away a few blocks when the detective leaped off.

It was not long before he was on Knight's track again.

Brandon had hoped to intercept him, and had succeeded, and trailed the fellow to his own house.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A CLOSE TRAIL.

It was certain once more Knight had dropped, and had played sharp.

The detective hastened to his own office.

Arrived there, he met Lady Kate.

"I am going out of town," he said, "and you must lay low for a few days."

"Have you struck a trail?"

"I think I have."

Brandon had jumped to a certain conclusion.

A certain little incident had given him a clew.

He felt assured that at last he was upon the sure track.

He exchanged a few more words with Lady Kate, giving her certain directions how to act under certain circumstances, and started forth.

Once again he had changed his disguise, and now felt certain that he would run Mr. Bayard Knight to his lair.

It was a most trifling discovery he had made, seemingly, but it told volumes to him.

The detective left his office, and made his way toward the Jersey City ferry.

He walked to and fro opposite the entrance way.

This wonderful man was acting under the inspiration of the smallest sort of a clew, and yet he was so certain of his bearings that he had not the least doubt but that, in a few moments, the correctness of his theory would be verified.

He had paced to and fro for about an hour, when a man came along, passed by the ferry-master, and went toward the boat that had just come in.

The detective was close upon the man's heels.

The man was dressed as a tramp, but our hero had seen that suit of clothes before.

In fact, at that very moment he held in his hand a little bit of pasteboard that he had extracted from those very clothes.

The man walked on the boat, but kept his eyes wandering from side to side, examining the face of every one he met.

"Oh, yes, my hearty, I am here," chuckled the detective; and he added, "I will be there, too, just about as soon as you are!"

Brandon was rejoiced.

It appeared as though the good fates had smiled upon him in most auspicious manner.

He might have had a long search, but there was the scoundrel Knight most probably prepared to lead him straight to his ultimate destination.

The detective had disguised himself in a most effectual manner, and it would have required a man to have been even keener than himself to have been competent to penetrate it.

The detective walked over across the deck, and actually brushed against his man.

The movement was so careless that Knight scowled on him fiercely, and said:

"Be careful, mister."

"What is the matter?"

"Keep to yourself."

"I have done nothing to you."

The pretended vagrant walked away.

Brandon indulged a quiet inward laugh, and went and took a seat in the cabin. Matters had turned out very nice for him, and he felt good.

The seeming tramp went through the gate leading from the ferry to the cars.

The detective was on his heels, and took a seat in the same railway carriage.

Both were just in time, and a few moments after they had seated themselves the train started.

Brandon had drawn a newspaper from his pocket, and was pretending to be reading, but every time he would raise his eyes he would catch the eye of the seeming vagrant fixed upon him.

It was late in the afternoon when our hero took the train, and it was after nightfall when they reached the town for which both had purchased tickets.

Brandon was compelled to play a deep and dangerous game.

Some strange instinct had evidently aroused Knight's suspicions.

When the train reached the depot, Knight arose and left the car. The detective, however, kept his seat.

A moment the train stopped, and then moved onward.

A few yards beyond the station, and Brandon went out upon the platform.

It was night, and no one could observe his movements from the station.

The car had struck full speed, yet the detect-

ive managed to leap from it and reach the ground in safety.

Rapidly he moved back toward the station.

He was within a few yards of it when he came face to face with Bayard Knight.

The *deep game*, however, was in progress, and it was expertly played.

During the brief moments before he leaped from the car, the detective had transformed his whole personal appearance.

Bayard Knight cast a keen, searching glance at him and passed on his way.

The detective gave an inward chuckle and passed beyond observation; he then turned and dogged the man's steps whom he was so cunningly "piping."

Knight proceeded along until he came to a house standing back some distance from the road, when he entered through the gate, and walked toward the house.

The detective was close at his heels, and, taking up a good position, settled down for a patient wait.

By some strange instinct, Brandon appeared to be able to anticipate the movements of any one he was tracking.

Half an hour passed, when a man came forth from the house.

The one who came forth presented a far different appearance from the one who had entered; but the keen detective recognized him as the same individual, nicely transformed from a seeming tramp into a respectable-looking man.

Bayard Knight came down the path leading from the house, and, turning up the road, walked briskly along.

Brandon still kept at his heels until he saw him enter the courtyard of a large public building.

The detective felt a glow of satisfaction.

He felt that now his long search was drawing to a close.

He recognized the building that Knight had entered as an insane asylum, and there was a coincident significance in the fact.

Bayard Knight went directly toward what appeared to be a private entrance, and rang the bell.

Quite a time passed, when the door was opened by a crust-looking man.

Knight spoke a few words, and was admitted.

The man who had opened the door led the way through a long passage, and ushered the visitor into a room which, seemingly, was part sitting room and part business office.

"Sit down," said the man, and disappeared.

A few moments passed, and a middle-aged, sharp-eyed man, evidently a foreigner, entered the room.

"Ah, good-evening, Mr. Grant; I am glad you have come!"

"How is the patient, Hilker?"

"Ah! well, I am very much alarmed about our patient."

"Sick?"

"No."

"What are you alarmed about?"

"I am afraid that she has really lost her mind."

"Nonsense."

"Oh! you may say nonsense! but you have not had so much experience as I have in these matters."

"What are her symptoms?"

"The worst that may be anticipated."

"Does she rave?"

"No; I wish she did."

"What leads you to think she is insane then?"

Extreme melancholy?"

"No, I wish she were melancholy."

"If she does not rave and is not melancholy, what sign does she exhibit?"

"She is as contented and merry as though she were to be a bride."

As the doctor uttered the explanation, he smiled in a peculiar manner, and fixed a singular glance upon Knight.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"You are either joking, or talking in riddles."

"I am neither talking in riddles, nor joking."

"Well, please speak out plainly just what you do mean."

"I have done so; listen. At first she raved, then suddenly she became melancholy, and now suddenly she has become pleasant and merry and shows every sign of contentment; she does not repine, does not beg to be released, as she

did when she first came here, but outwardly acts as quiet and rational as any one."

"I should say that was a good sign."

"You have not had my experience."

"What do you argue from the change?"

"She meditates something."

"What?"

"Suicide."

"And that makes her contented and happy?"

"Yes."

"Is she watched?"

"Yes; but she is dangerous; there may be a moment when she may accomplish her purpose; her contentment argues that she knows just how she can accomplish any purpose she may have in view."

"Do you suppose she has had any communication with any one from outside?"

"No; who could communicate with her here?"

"I trust no one, and yet there is one of the shrewdest men in the United States on my track."

"Who?"

"Brandon, the detective."

Little did Bayard Knight dream that at that very moment the detective he was talking about had his ear under the window of the room where the conversation above recorded was in progress.

The office where the two villains were holding their talk was on the first floor.

When Knight had passed within the building, Brandon had taken a glance through the open door, and in that brief glance had got a partial view of the lay of the building.

He had passed around to the side of the house, and following the right, tracked the visitor to the room where he met the doctor.

When Knight mentioned the name of Brandon, Hilker gave a start, and exclaimed:

"I hope that man has no suspicion that the girl is in this building, especially if he has any interest in her."

"Why do you especially fear him?"

"I had some dealings with that man once; he is a dangerous man to have on one's track. You do not think he is on yours to-night?"

"No, sir; he may be a cunning man, but I pride myself I am his match. I've played him all along!"

"Is he on the lay to find the girl?"

"No."

"I am glad of that."

"Why?"

"Because he is not the man I would like to meet just now."

Little did the villain Hilker dream that Brandon was not only on his track, but had already seen and recognized him.

Knight said:

"Brandon is not piping for the gal, he is tracking me on another deal."

"He has no interest in the girl, then?"

"None."

"All right! better for you and for me, and now let's come to business. You have arranged to marry that girl to-night?"

"Yes."

"Are you prepared to fulfill your agreement with me?"

"As to the money?"

"Yes."

"Partly."

"I will not be satisfied with a partly fulfilled agreement. I must have every dollar we agreed upon!"

"I can pay you half, and give security for the balance."

"That won't do!"

"It must do."

"Hold on, Grant! I know you of old; you can't come a double deal on me!"

"I might bring in Brandon to my assistance," asserted Knight, at a venture.

Dr. Hilker turned pale, and a wicked gleam shone in his eyes, as he said:

"I see you are up to your old tricks; but listen: I have arranged matters to match you; and besides, I have studied into this case, I might pay me to marry that girl myself!"

"Bayard Knight laughed in a pleasant manner and said:

"I was but joking; but seriously, you must not demand all the money down."

"Every cent! I have taken large chances and I have had to buy the silence of two or three in this building."

"I know when silence costs less, on one occasion."

"Shout off any more of that, and matters may go hard with you!" exclaimed the doctor, in a threatening tone.

"A truce to quarreling; what is the lowest sum you will take?"

"Every dollar agreed upon; no less."

"I want to see Renie."

That was the first time the girl's name had been mentioned, and a great thrill went through Brandon's heart.

All doubt was solved.

The beautiful girl lived, and he was near by to deliver her from the hands of the two cold-blooded villains who were bargaining about her.

"I will take you to her room," said the doctor, adding, "but remember our agreement must be closed to-night. I dare not take the risk of her keeping any longer."

"A sudden change has come over you?"

"Yes."

"You fear Brandon?"

"I do."

"I tell you he has no interest in the girl."

"I have learned not to risk much on your word," said the doctor, bluntly.

"I want to see the girl alone."

"You are up to some game."

"I have no game to play."

"Don't attempt any, as I have matters all arranged to play against any sort of treachery."

"I have no game to play, only with your assistance."

The doctor rose from his seat, took a lamp, and said:

"Come!"

Bayard Knight also rose, and the two conspirators left the room.

The detective tried the sash of the window opening from the office.

It yielded to his pressure, and raising it he leaped into the room, and seating himself in a chair, muttered:

"I will await the doctor's return."

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE MAD-HOUSE.

BRANDON felt that there was no time in his life when he was more in need of calmness than when he sat in that room, waiting for that doctor.

He knew that the house was full of able assistants, who were willing and prepared to aid their master in any undertaking, no matter how desperate.

He had reason to believe also, that the house was full of traps, pitfalls, ready to take in any unwary intruder.

The detective had been waiting for some time, but the doctor did not return.

"It may be that I am being fooled!" muttered Brandon; and he arose from his seat, intending to pass out to the hall and explore a little.

He found the passage dark.

This little circumstance aroused his suspicions, as it is always customary in large buildings to keep at least a dim light burning in all the hallways.

He advanced a few steps, when a sound fell upon his ears that warned him of the approach of some one.

It took but an instant to retreat back into the office.

A moment passed and he listened.

The party appeared to have turned back.

"I reckon I must be getting insane," muttered the detective, as he arose again to go to the door.

Suddenly a most startling apparition met his gaze.

The door was pushed partly open, and the pale, startled face of a woman was thrust through the opening.

For an instant the disguised detective was too greatly surprised to speak, but, quickly getting down to the emergency, he asked:

"What do you want?"

The woman motioned to him to be silent, and with a noiseless, cat-like step moved into the room, but every second cast a furtive glance behind her.

The detective concluded that one of the patients had broken loose, and was wandering like a ghost about the house.

The situation was an awkward one.

He could not summon assistance, as his own serious business required that he should not show his hand ahead of time.

The woman, who did not look like a lunatic, save that her face was ghastly pale crossed the room, and in a convulsive manner, seized the detective's arm.

"You are an outsider?" she said, in a low, clear whisper.

Brandon nodded affirmatively.

"You have no connection with this house?"

"None whatever."

"You came in here in a clandestine manner?"

"I did."

"You are not in the pay of the doctor?"

"I am not."

"You are not his friend?"

"I am not."

"You tell me truly?"

"I do."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated the woman.

The detective began to think that the woman was not a lunatic after all.

She spoke in a too direct manner for a person having a deranged intellect.

Her next remark convinced him that his first conclusion as to her sanity was a clear mistake.

"I am one of the female keepers in this house."

"Has something happened?"

"Hast they would kill me if it was ever known that I said one word."

"You need not fear to confide in me, I will render you all the assistance you need if you are in danger, or any one else."

"You will never betray me?"

"Never! but tell me how did you discover that I was in the house, and not connected with it?"

"I saw that assassin enter; I noticed from my window that you were dogging him, and I have been watching your movements ever since."

"Well, what have you to tell me?"

The woman placed her lips to our hero's ear and whispered, distinctly:

"You have been dogging a murderer!"

"Who has he murdered?"

"Oh! if I were sure you would not betray me!"

"I swear not only not to betray you, but I will protect you from any harm!"

The woman cast a sharp glance over her shoulder, and then whispered in a low, startling tone:

"There has been a murder committed in the house!"

The detective's blood ran cold, and it cost him an extraordinary effort to ask:

"When?"

"This very night, within this very hour—since you have been beneath this roof!"

Brandon thought that he could now explain the delay in the doctor's return; and, again, he could not understand, from the conversation he had overheard, why they should desire Renie's death.

A fresh suspicion shot across his mind—"What if the doctor had murdered Bayard Knight?"

The detective well knew that the man was fully capable of any dark deed.

The woman again whispered:

"Come, I will show you the body."

"Who has been murdered—a man or a woman?" asked Brandon.

"A woman."

"Do you know her name?"

"Yes."

"Tell it me."

"You will betray me?"

"Never!"

"The victim of the assassins is a beautiful young girl, whose name is Re--"

"Heavens!" almost yelled the detective, "do not say more, but lead me to where I can behold her body, and Heaven have mercy upon her murderers, for I'll not spare them!"

"Follow me," said the woman, and she stole on tip-toe from the room.

The detective stole after her, his eyes gleaming with smothered glances of vengeance.

He now felt assured that after all his weary weeks of "piping," scheming, and shadowing, he had arrived at the goal one hour too late.

He did not doubt for a moment the woman's story, and explained the murder on the ground that the doctor and Knight must have got into a dispute, and that the girl had become the poor murdered victim of their quarrel.

The woman turned off from the main passage, and proceeded rapidly through a narrow hall that led laterally from the main hall.

Suddenly she came to a halt, and whispered:

"We must go carefully or we will be discovered."

"By whom?"

"The assassin."

"Never you mind them, let us be discovered—I am prepared!"

The woman opened a door, and said:

"You go down first, I am afraid."

The detective had his little marked lantern with him, and slipping the slide, he let a ray of light through the opening.

The light disclosed a stairway evidently leading into a sub cellar.

"Go down quick!" said the woman, in a weird whisper.

"Why shall I go down there?"

"Nobody is down there!"

"Did they murder her down there?"

"No, they carried the corpse there after the murder."

A second suspicion flashed through Brandon's mind.

The suggestion presented itself that after all it might be that he was being fooled by a lunatic.

She had not, up to this time, talked like one, but there was still a possibility that she was.

He thought the matter over in his mind and readily perceived when he came to think it over how improbable her story was.

It would have been easy enough for her to have gathered sufficient points to have founded her terrible tale upon.

Insane people have frequently done even more wonderful things.

Brandon thought he would humor her, and slipped through the open door.

"Go down!" she whispered.

He stepped down two or three steps, when suddenly the door flew to, and a wild, demoniac laugh rang through the house.

Brandon, however, had been prepared for the movement.

His foot was braced between the door and the casing.

He forced the door back and came forth, when the poor crazy creature fled like a deer.

"Fooled just once, and by a lunatic!" muttered Brandon, as he returned to the doctor's office.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### A VILLAIN MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

A few moments passed, and a step was heard advancing along the hall.

"Ahh!" he comes, said Brandon, and he calmly awaited.

In a second the door opened, and Dr. Hilker entered the room.

The latter uttered an exclamation of surprise, and stood gazing at the strange intruder, with a glance of amazement.

"Good-evenin', doctor," said the detective, assuming an Irish brogue.

"Who are you?"

"A frind that has just stepped in to se yer."

"Who let you in?"

"Begorra! I let mysel' in."

"You rascal! how dare you enter this building!"

"Wasn't I just asther tellin' yer I cum in to hev a talk wid yer?"

"I want you to get out of here the way you came, just as quick as you can travel."

"Shure that's no way to treat a gentleman who has dropped in to hev a talk wid yer."

The doctor crossed the room, went to a desk and drew forth a cocked revolver; as he turned round with the weapon in his hand, he started upon seeing that he was covered with the muzzle of a pistol in the hands of the audacious stranger.

"Take it cool, doctor, and sit down."

"I shall summon assistance."

"If ye raise yer voice, it will be the last time yer tongue will serve you."

"Would you murder me?"

"No, I'll not barum a hair of yer head, ef ye will only act decent like; but I ain't going to let yer murdrer me in cold blood, ayther."

"What do you want here?"

"I want to talk wid yer."

It flashed across the doctor's mind that some inmate of the asylum had broken loose and had found his way to the private office; and yet he could not remember ever having seen his bold visitor's face among any of his present or former patients.

"If you want to talk with me you must ~~ask~~ me to summon one of my assistants."

"No; take it aisy un' yer all right."

"A tap of that bell will bring half a dozen strong men to my assistance."

"Ye had better not tap that bell; it will be yer last tap."

"You threaten me?"  
"Sit down and take it easy, and no harm will come to you."

"Again, what do you want?"

"I want to talk with you."

"Talk about what?"

"The girl you have confined here."

"I have a great many girls under my charge; about which one do you wish to talk?"

"The young lady."

"They're all young ladies."

"Well, the one Bayard Knight, or Mr. Grant, as you call him, has just gone to talk with him. If Satan himself had suddenly confronted Dr. Hilker, he could not have shown more terror than he did at the words of his singular visitor.

"You are not what you appear!" exclaimed the doctor.

"If I am not what I am, who am I?" asked the detective.

"I demand to know who you are!"

"Dr. Hilker, I believe, you call yourself?"

"Are you an escaped lunatic?"

"Well, I reckon I'm not, and to prove it I tell you who you are; when I knew you first your name was LENAIRE!"

The doctor's pistol flew up, and he would have sent a ball crashing through the detective's skull, had not the latter been prepared for the movement. Quick as a flash, Brandon leaped across the room and seized the doctor's arm, and changing his voice, said, in a firm tone: "Hold on, you villain! none of your old tricks!"

"Brandon!" ejaculated the doctor.

"Yes, Brandon, Dr. LENAIRE, and you and I have met again."

"Are you man or devil?"

"I reckon I am the man and you are the devil! And now, how is it, will you make terms, or must I lay you to rest?"

"How make terms?"

"I am on the track of Bayard Knight; you are not my game now."

"You are a man of your word?"

"I am."

"Will you promise not to put me up if I turn over?"

"I'll not disturb you unless you have in any way harmed the girl, Renie Rutherford."

"Renie Rutherford! Is that the name of the girl Bayard Knight placed in my charge?"

"Unquestionably, yes!"

"The villain!"

"It don't sound well for you and me to call each other bad names; but I will take this little 'barker,' and you and I will talk matters over."

"You need not fear me."

"I do not fear you, but I will not trust you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to lead me to the room where the girl is confined."

"I have your word that you will not lay me up?"

"Yes."

"Your word is good; follow me."

"I do not want Knight to know I am after him."

"You need not fear."

"He promised you five thousand?"

"It's lost now!"

"Not if you stand right up to the racket with me."

"You can depend that I dare not do otherwise."

"That's honest; lead the way."

Dr. Hilker took the same lamp he had carried when leading Knight, and the detective followed him.

The doctor stopped in front of a room on which was painted the number, thirty-one.

He had walked on tiptoe, and had cautioned the detective to do likewise.

Arrived in front of number thirty-one, he motioned toward room twenty-nine, and whispered:

"The girl is in there; you and I can go in number thirty-one, and watch them."

The moment had arrived for the detective to act.

He suddenly seized LENAIRE by the throat.

He knew just where and how to seize him, so that he could not make even the first outcry.

In his powerful grasp the doctor was like an infant.

Brandon bore him along toward room thirty-three.

Already the villain's form had become limp.

Quickly the detective opened the door of room thirty-three, and swiftly dashed in, carrying the doctor with him.

Once within the room Brandon proceeded to effectually gag and handcuff his victim.

His quick, keen eye speedily took in the whole situation.

The room had been cunningly constructed, so as to serve as a sort of observation-point.

Brandon struck the lookout loopholes, and glanced into the adjoining room.

A dramatic sight met his gaze.

Bayard Knight stood at a table, holding a pen in his hand, pointing toward a paper.

Upon the floor, on her knees, a perfect picture of misery and despair, was Renie Rutherford.

A thrill shot through Brandon's heart.

A thrill such as he had never experienced before in all his life.

Oh! how beautiful was the girl!

He had carried a memory of her, but the memory had not represented her to him as beautiful as she now appeared to him in life.

It were as though he were gazing upon one risen from the dead.

For a moment his emotions and agitation were so great that he could not see.

He was not the man, however, to long yield to emotions.

He looked back into the room, attracted by hearing Knight's voice.

"Sign this paper, Renie, and from hence your life shall be one of joy and happiness!"

"I can not sign it!"

"You mean you will not sign it?"

"Have you no mercy in your heart?"

"I am acting mercifully to you in giving you an opportunity to sign this paper."

"Was it mercy to steal me from my home by trick and device, and immure me in this place?"

"I did all for your own good."

"I do not believe you are capable of doing a good action!" exclaimed Renie, suddenly leaping to her feet, and speaking in a tone of disdain.

"What! a moment ago, and you were suing for mercy."

"Yes, to a demon!"

"And now you are determined to do what?"

"Defy you!"

"Listen to me one moment, and learn the fate that awaits you if you do not sign that paper."

"I do not wish to hear."

"You must hear."

"Nay, nay."

"Beneath this building you will find your grave."

"I would rather find my grave there than do as you say."

"Do nothing rash."

"I am determined."

"I will go from your presence."

"Do so, and never enter this room again."

"Will you calmly listen to a proposition I have to make?"

"I will not."

"Well, I will go away," said Knight; and he turned and took a step toward the door.

It was as much as Burt Brandon could do to restrain himself from bursting into the room and knocking the rascal down.

The detective, however, was playing for certain points; and as he knew that he was near to guard Renie from any real harm, he was not uneasy concerning her.

"Bayard Knight, you have done me wrong enough."

"But I may right all that wrong."

"You can by leaving my presence, and keeping out of my sight forever."

"I possess the secret of your life, Renie; I never told you that before."

A strange look of interest came over the beautiful girl's face.

Bayard Knight saw the look of interest, and at once recognized his power.

Renie had always guessed that her pretended guardian possessed the secret of her life, and she long yearned in her heart to learn it.

"Are you speaking truly?" she asked.

"I am, on my honor."

"Why withhold the truth from me?"

"Become my wife, and you shall know all. I will take you to your mother, a woman, though older, not less beautiful than yourself."

"Oh, why attach such a condition?"

"You really hate me, then?"

"I do not hate you, but I fear you."

Bayard Knight knew that matters were closing down upon him that might at any moment spoil all chance for the accomplishment of the purpose for which he had been so long scheming.

It had come to such a pass, that, rather than

lose all, he was willing to make a sort of compromise.

"Suppose I should tell you that you are a great heiress?"

"I would willingly resign all claim to any money if I could only find my mother."

"Will you sign certain papers if I will promise to take you to your mother?"

"I will."

"When?"

"At once."

Bayard Knight drew some papers from his pocket and laid them beside those that had been lying upon the table during the whole time the detective had been watching him.

"There are the papers, Renie; come and sign them, and I will resign all claim to your hand, and lead you to your mother."

"When?"

"This very night."

"Can I trust you?"

"You can trust me; as by signing these papers I accomplish all that I have been scheming for."

"What are the conditions in those papers?"

"Merely a promise to pay me a hundred thousand dollars when you come into your fortune; and that amount is not more than one tenth of the money you are to receive."

Renie put no faith in the honor of Bayard Knight, but the cunning man had presented the matter in such a light as led her to believe that for once he meant what he said.

The girl's emotions were strange enough.

There had always lurked in her mind a suspicion that she had relatives living; and she was not astonished when Knight told her that she was an heiress.

She thought that she could perceive that the man's object all the time had been to make money out of her in some way; and now that he confessed it, she felt that for once she could trust him.

"If I sign those papers, you will take me to my mother at once?"

"Yes."

"Where is my mother?"

"Not more than two hours from here."

"And you swear to take me to her at once?"

"I do."

"I will sign the papers."

Renie advanced to the table, and as she did so, and stood with her back toward Knight, a smile of triumph came over his face, expressive of his great joy.

His last device had succeeded.

Had Renie had more experience, she would have known the danger of signing papers without studying their contents; and although she had no faith in Knight, she did not dream of the cunning trap he had set for her.

"Where shall I sign?" she asked.

Knight advanced to the table, and pointed to the place where she was to sign.

In an instant the deed was done.

"Thank you, darling," said Knight, in a peculiar and wondrously significant tone.

Renie was startled by the strangeness of his tone, and made a movement to catch hold of the papers, but Knight had transferred them to his pocket.

A fearful pallor overspread Renie's face as she asked, in a trembling tone:

"Did you tell me the truth about those papers?"

"Yes."

"Were they merely an agreement to pay you a hundred thousand dollars in case I had it to transfer?"

"Well, yes, in a certain sense, that was the nature of them."

"Tell me plainly, what have I done?"

"I promised to take you to your mother."

"You did."

"I will keep my word."

"To-night?"

"We will start to-night, but only on one condition."

"Ah, ha! you would already make another condition?"

"No; the condition is here in these papers."

"Name it."

"On your bended knees swear before Heaven to abide by the contract you have signed."

"I must read the contract first."

"No, you must swear blindly."

"I will not unless you let me read those papers."

"It makes no difference whether you swear or not, there is no law on the statute book that will release you."

"What have I done?"

"You have become my wife!"  
Renie uttered a shrill scream, and exclaimed:  
"It is false!"  
"No; it is the truth."  
"Such a contract is not binding."  
"Indeed, darling, you are my wife by all law, both sacred and secular; and now you can read those papers!" and Knight drew them from his pocket and held them for the poor deluded girl to read.

During all this scene the detective kept his post.

Ah, if he could have only prompted Renie a few words just at that moment, she would have captured, within the second, all the little points he was so patiently and keenly waiting for.

Renie glanced at the papers, and gasped:

"Ah! even if they are what you say, I am not bound by them."

"My dear, you can never establish that in court. You are my wife, morally and legally."

"Oh, have mercy upon me!" moaned Renie.

"Have mercy upon yourself. Yield to what is inevitable."

Half speaking to herself, Renie murmured: "I have struggled against this; I can but die."

"Do you not wish to see your mother?"

"I do."

"You shall."

Knight had made an attempt to outwit Dr. Hilker, and he thought he had succeeded by the little scheme he had carried through.

It was his intention on the following day to demand Renie's release, and he did not intend to pay the doctor the sum agreed upon between them.

Now that Renie was his wife, no action for false incarceration would amount to anything. In fact, the villain had at last accomplished all that he had set out to accomplish.

Poor Renie! In her innocence she felt that she really was the wife of the wretch who had played such an ignoble trick upon her.

The very next words that fell from her lips brought joy to his heart.

They were an indication of the acceptance of the situation.

Alas! the man was misled.

Poor Renie had been foully deceived; but never in life would she accept the situation.

As matters stood, but one desire remained to her.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A TRAGEDY.

DURING those brief moments Renie had been revolving a certain line of action through her mind.

She would pretend to accept the situation, beguile the man into taking her to her mother, and then, if his words were true, she would seek legal remedy.

It is a known fact that the near presence of a friend, though unseen, will mysteriously suggest his or her image to the mind.

We do not attempt to explain or account for this singular psychological phenomenon, but it is of most frequent occurrence in the experience of every sensitive person.

At the moment when Renie stood in that room alone with Bayard Knight, she felt the necessity of a friend, and most strangely at that moment a thought swept across her mind that, ah! if Brandon only knew of her peril, how he would hasten to her rescue.

At the moment she could not have had the remotest suspicion that he had any interest in her fate at all.

All these thoughts passed through her mind during the few brief seconds succeeding her betrayer's startling announcement.

"I am ready," she said; "take me to my mother."

"Not to-night, but shortly."

"You promised me to-night."

"I will tell you about your mother."

"Do so."

Bayard Knight proceeded, and told a long story.

He had touched the ground at last that Burt Brandon had been anticipating.

The man told facts that Brandon believed to be true, and, among other things, told Renie that Ruthendale was her real name, and that she was the daughter who had been supposed to have been drowned in the lake in her father's park.

The man admitted the facts and related corroborative circumstances that no one but he could have furnished.

He also furnished clews sufficient for Brandon to make a clear case of the whole Ruthendale mystery.

The hour of deliverance had come, and yet the detective hesitated about rushing into that room.

He had his game well in hand, and wished to watch the play.

He had his fish securely hooked, and could afford to let him tug awhile.

When Knight had concluded, Renie said: "You will not take me to my mother to-night?"

"I can not to-night."

"Well, go away, now; come early to-morrow and fulfill your promise."

Renie's manner had changed. It was a part of her purpose to play a game—a deep game.

Her last words caused a most singular look to flash across Bayard Knight's face.

"You will go now," cried Renie.

At that moment the door of the room opened. Burt Brandon stepped in, and confronting the villain, said, in a perfectly calm voice:

"Hold on, Knight!"

The detective was disguised, and at first the villain did not recognize him.

He thought it was one of the attendants in the asylum, who had been attracted to the spot.

"Who are you?" he asked, fiercely.

"It don't matter who I am; unhand that lady at once!"

Knight did unhand Renie, but putting his hand in his pocket, he drew forth a pistol, and said

"Leave this room!"

"Drop that pistol!"

Knight suddenly discharged the weapon.

Brandon was prepared for the shot, and dodged in time to save his life.

The next moment he leaped across the room, and with one blow of his billy, knocked the pistol from Knight's hand.

The latter, at that moment, recognized the rescuer.

"Ah! hal Brandon!"

"Yes, Brandon."

"By Heaven, I'll have you settled forever!"

"You speak my sentiments toward yourself."

"We'll see!" exclaimed Knight. And the man's face gleamed with a terrible expression.

Brandon was prepared for any desperate move, and kept his keen eyes on the man whom he had so patiently run down.

"You think you have run me to earth?"

"Well I know I have, villain!"

"As you value your life, leave this room!"

"When I do I shall take you with me; your career of villainy is about run."

Knight, seeing himself outwitted, put a pistol to his own temple and fired. It did not need a very close scrutiny to see that his career was at an end.

At that moment a light flared into the room and a man stepped in.

The man who came into the room was the janitor.

"What has happened?" asked the man.

"Stay here with the light," said Brandon; and he entered the adjoining room, where he had left Dr. Hilker.

Removing the gag from the doctor's mouth, the detective said:

"I will let up on you for all the past if you will act like a man at this juncture."

"What has happened?" asked the doctor, in a fearful tone.

"Knight was playing you false."

"No, sir."

"I tell you yes."

"But I had matters fixed so he could not play me false."

"I tell you he has tried to play you false."

"What has happened?"

"Knight was trying to force Renie Ruthendale to sign a forged marriage contract."

"Has he succeeded?"

"He did not succeed."

"I will get square with him for attempting to play false on me. You know, Brandon, I am a bad man to cross."

"Yes, but I fear you will never have a chance to get square with Knight in this world."

"What has happened? Do not keep me in suspense!"

"Knight has undertaken to square matters himself."

"How? how? tell me quick!"

"First, promise me to do all you can to right all the matters you have had a hand in setting wrong."

"I promise."

"You must make up your mind to keep your promise, or, as sure as my name is Brandon, you will be in the undertaker's hands in a few hours."

"You can depend upon me."

"You know the risk you run?"

"I do."

The detective now stated to the doctor just how he wished him to act under the circumstances, and told him just what explanations he wanted him to make.

The doctor readily agreed, and the two men together entered the room.

Renie was standing in the center of the floor, with clasped hands, gazing upon a most ghastly sight.

Lying on the floor, in one corner, lay Bayard Knight.

"Let me lead you from this room," said Brandon, taking Renie by the hand.

"Do not take me away after all I have passed through," pleaded Renie.

"But would you remain amidst this scene of horror?"

"Is Bayard Knight dead?"

"I do not know."

"He may be dying," said Renie.

"I should not be surprised."

"Then I must go to him."

"Why?"

"He may be conscious; he may know that he is about to die; he may relent."

"He can do you no more harm."

"But he can do me a great deal of good."

"How?"

"Do you remember that that man charged me with theft?"

"The charge amounts to nothing."

"But it has never been retracted."

"It matters not if it never is retracted."

"But there are other matters he may assist me in."

"Name them."

"I believe he knows my history."

"My dear young lady, there is not a word that man can tell you about your history that I can not tell you just as well."

"You tell me about my former history?"

"Yes; I know all your history."

"Are you telling me the truth, or are you merely telling me this to pacify me, so as to get me to go from this scene of horror?"

"I am telling you the actual truth. In a most remarkable manner, all the facts of your early life have come into my possession. But, come; you must go away."

Dr. Hilker had entered the room.

He was a skillful physician, although he had been a rascal all his life, and the instincts of his profession led him to go to the side of Knight.

A slight examination was sufficient to satisfy him that the man was beyond all hope of recovery.

He still lived, however, and the doctor sent his janitor to the office for stimulants.

In the meantime the detective had led Renie to the office, and had returned.

"Is he dead?" asked Brandon.

"No; but he has not long to live."

"Will he be able to speak?"

"I can not tell."

The man returned with the stimulants, and Hilker soon so far restored Knight as to cause him to ask:

"What has happened?"

"Let me answer him," said the detective, and Brandon knelt beside the dying man.

"You are dying."

"Ah, hal Brandon!"

"Yes."

"You have laid me out."

"No."

"Ah! I remember now; and you escaped?"

"Yes; I escaped."

"And Renie?"

"Thank Heaven, she is safe. You are the only victim of your crime."

"Where is Hilker?"

"He is here."

"Doctor, how is it with me?"

"You have less than an hour to live."

"You are telling me the truth?"

"I am."

"I can not be saved?"

"You can not."

"Well, I must do something for my soul."

"Do what is right and just," prompted Brandon.

"I never thought to come to this, Brandon."

"You brought it on yourself, my man."

"You have triumphed over me at last, Brandon."

"No, you have only been brought to a stand by an offended Providence."

"You are a wonderful man, Brandon. I wish I could have made you my friend, and not have been forced to play against you."

"You never could have made me a friend to aid you in any wicked scheme."

"You say Renie has escaped?"

"Yes."

"She is not harmed at all?"

"Thank Heaven! I think I can say she is not harmed at all."

"Well, she is a wonderful girl."

Dr. Hilker stepped forward and said:

"Knight, you have not much time to spare; if you have any reparation to make, you had better be about it."

"And must I really die?"

"There is no hope for you."

"Brandon, tell me one thing. What started you to take up Renie Ruthendale's case?"

"Your false charge against her in court."

"Had you never seen her until that day?"

"I never had."

"And if I had not made that charge against her, you would not have been in the race against me?"

"Possibly not."

"Answer me one more question. Were you and Hilker in together?"

"No."

"Then you shadowed me to this place?"

"Yes."

"You were the man I met at the depot?"

"Yes."

"Brandon, you are a wonderful man."

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

#### HE ESCAPES AT LAST.

BRANDON was compelled to smile at Knight's strange remarks, and yet he was anxious to have the man speak upon other subjects.

"You have but a little time, Knight, and you had better use it to some service."

"Hang you Brandon, two or three times I came near having the 'collar-brace' on you."

"Well, it was a closely played game," answered the detective, disposed to humor a dying man.

"How much time have I, Hilker?"

"You are a dying man."

"Dead sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have got to get something off my mind."

"Do it quick, or you will never get it off."

"Bring pen, paper and ink."

Dr. Hilker secured pen and paper, and in a feeble voice Bayard Knight confessed facts that were sufficient to place Mrs. Ruthendale in complete possession of her rights.

The poor man who had led such a scheming life, had but just time to subscribe to his confession, when he died.

Our hero again sought the presence of Renie. Oh! how beautiful she looked, despite all the fearful trials through which she had passed!

Brandon told her of Knight's death.

"How came you here to rescue me?" asked Renie.

"My dear girl, I have been upon your track ever since the hour you first so mysteriously disappeared."

"What led you to take such an interest in my fate?"

"Pure sympathy for one so beautiful, innocent, and unfortunate."

"You are a noble man!"

"Oh! never mind that. But do you remember what Knight told you about yourself?"

"Yes, yes, and it was all a falsehood, I believe now."

"My dear girl, I have reason to believe that, once in his life, that man told the truth."

"And do you believe that I have a mother living?"

"I know that you have a dear and loving mother who has spent all the years of her life searching for you."

Renie uttered a scream, and felt insensible into Brandon's arms.

She had faced danger and sorrow, but this sudden joy was more than she could bear.

It was some time before Brandon succeeded in bringing the lovely girl round.

When Renie did revive, her first words were:

"You told me I had a mother?"

"You have."

"And a father?"

"Your father is dead—died many years ago—but your mother lives, and at this moment anxiously waits to clasp you in her arms."

"And I really have a mother. Joy, joy!" exclaimed Renie, in the joyful manner of a child.

"Yes, you have a mother—beautiful, devoted, brave, and true. She has passed through many perils searching for you."

"And how did you discover that I had a mother?"

The detective related the history of the female detective who was known in the profession as Lady Kate.

It was arranged that the detective and Renie should remain at the asylum over night.

Dr. Lenair, or Hilker as he was known in the asylum, was very attentive, and in every way appeared desirous of showing some extra attention to Brandon.

At length the suspicions of the latter were aroused.

He felt that Lenair's open enmity was a safer reliance than his professed friendship.

He determined to be upon his guard.

The doctor was a man of great resources in any scheme of villainy.

Brandon had promised him immunity, but Hilker was not a man who trusted to promises. He was an individual who preferred trusting to his own cunning.

It was within a few hours of daylight when Bayard Knight had finished his confession.

It was broad daylight when Dr. Hilker invited the detective and Renie into his dining-room.

The latter had improved an opportunity to prepare herself for a journey.

Since she had been in the asylum all her former wardrobe had been restored to her, and when she appeared before the detective, dressed in elegant attire, her ravishing beauty became even more striking.

The detective had learned from her the story of her abduction, and had learned also that she had been in the asylum ever since the day following her capture by Knight's agents.

The detective learned by her story that she could not have been the person who had been confined in that mysterious room at the house in New York, No. 429.

The doctor, as he showed his guests into the breakfast room, was as pleasant and polite as though the parties were old friends, and not people whom he had tried to make his victims.

Brandon was on his guard.

He feared the man, and felt certain that he was up to some game.

They were seated at the table, and one of the matrons sat at the head of the table to pour the coffee.

The detective studied this woman's face.

The face was passed to all hands.

Brandon had warned Renie neither eat nor drink until she could receive a certain signal from him.

The detective had appeared to be busy glancing all over the room, but in reality he was watching every movement at that table.

He saw both Hilker and the matron drink their coffee and eat of what was upon the table.

The signal was passed to Renie to eat and drink.

The girl raised the coffee cup to her lips, when a sudden change of expression passed over the doctor's face.

Brandon saw that expression, and to him it told volumes.

He reached across the table, and seizing the cup from Renie's hand, stepped around, and seizing hold of Hilker, said:

Drink that coffee."

"Are you have a suspicion," said the doctor, in the deepest tones, and raising the cup to his lips, he drained it to the dregs.

Neither Brandon nor Renie could eat anything after what had occurred, and a short time after they left the house which had been Renie's prison.

When half way to the depot, Brandon remarked:

"I reckon that was a false suspicion I regard'd the coffee."

The king of the detectives would have thought otherwise, had he known that the moment Hilker left the table he had hastened to his laboratory and had hastily drunk the contents of a little vial.

The contents of that vial was an antidote for the poison in the cup of both Renie and her res-

cuer, and both would have been poisoned had they drunk the fatal draught prepared for them.

The doctor would have had no antidote for them.

He had thrown his last die, and had lost. And one hour after Brandon's departure, Dr. Hilker also stole forth.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The doctor did not trust Brandon's word, and he had gone out upon the world to find a new field for his peculiar talents.

He had sinned all his life to gain a sudden fortune, and, when gray haired, was no nearer to his goal than when he first commenced.

He feared Brandon.

A man who never had been faithful himself could have no faith in any one else.

In a moment of revenge he had tried to poison two innocent persons, and having failed in his wicked attempt, he feared exposure and retribution, and voluntarily became once more a wanderer on the face of the earth.

In the meantime, Brandon and the rescued Renie had reached New York.

On the way they had enjoyed a long talk, and many explanations had followed.

The detective told Renie many facts concerning her mother, who still lived, and her father who was dead—murdered by that villain, Bayard Knight, who claimed to be a neighbor, but who in reality was merely the son of a step-brother of old Mr. Ruthendale, and not a blood relation to any of the dead Ruthendale family.

Renie did not appear greatly surprised at the detective's startling revelation.

She had suspected all along that she was a stolen child, and had always entertained a faint suspicion that Knight was at the bottom of her original abduction.

Arrived in New York, Brandon took his charge to a hotel, and started off in search of that noble woman who had spent so many years searching for her lost child—found at last through the keenness, and courage, and wonderful cunning of the King of the Detectives.

Brandon had sent a telegram to Mrs. Ruthendale, ordering her to meet him at his office, and, when he reached there, he found the anxious woman awaiting him.

Her handsome face was contorted with anxiety, and, so great was her agitation, her trembling lips would not shape the words she wished to speak.

Brandon knew that good news seldom killed, and that suspense was more dangerous than an open declaration:

"It's all right, madam," he exclaimed, in a cheerful note, as he grasped her hand, and shook it cordially.

At length the agitated mother found strength to articulate the words:

"Have you found my child?"

"I have."

"Alive?"

"Yes."

"No doubt as to her identity?"

"Not the least."

"Oh, heavens! where is she?"

"Safe and sound."

"Under your care?"

"Under my care."

"Send me to her at once! delay not a moment!"

"Have you strength to meet her?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Will you not listen first to what has happened?"

"No, no, take me to my child!"

"Bayard Knight is dead," said the detective, abruptly.

"Bayard Knight dead?"

"Yes."

"Did you kill him? Is my child injured, and you dare not tell me?"

"Your child is uninjured."

"Bayard Knight—how did he die?"

"By his own hand."

"Did he make any confession?"

"He did."

"Has he done my child justice?"

"He has—full, ample justice; but only because he was dying, and further injury would not avail him."

"Take me to my daughter."

"I must tell you all that has happened first."

And Brandon proceeded and related all that had occurred.

At length Brandon prepared to unite the long separated mother and daughter.

It was one of the happiest moments of his

life, and he considered his last piece of detective work the greatest he had ever performed.

A carriage was at the door, and the happy mother was placed in it.

A short drive, and they reached the hotel where Renie was temporarily quartered.

A moment later, and mother and daughter were clasped in each other's arms.

It needed not for Brandon to say:

"Mother, there is your daughter; daughter, there is your mother."

Nature anticipated him; and the head of poor Renie, after many years of suffering and pain, was once more buried in her mother's bosom.

The moment Renie's eyes had rested upon her mother, the long-closed wells of memory were reopened, and at a glance the vision that had so long haunted her became a living picture.

Old memories crowded thick and fast upon her, and now that her mother's face had reawakened these memories, she wondered that all had not been clearer to her in the past.

Brandon had disappeared the moment mother and daughter had become clasped in each other's arms.

After an hour he entered the room.

Both the beautiful women turned toward him, and began professions of gratitude.

"If you do not stop thanking me," exclaimed the blunt Brandon, "I shall go away and never see either one of you again."

His threat did not appear to frighten the two grateful women, who warmly protested that they owed all their present happiness to him.

General explanations at length were in order.

Brandon, having secured Knight's dying declaration, needed no further proof, and within a few days released Bruno from prison, also the two wretches who had sought to murder Mrs. Ruthendale, on condition that they would all leave the country and promise never to return. Two days later, Brandon, accompanied by the mother and daughter whom he had served so well, proceeded to a certain town in the western part of the State of New York.

They called in a body upon certain lawyers, and astonished them with the wonderful story they had to tell.

The story alone would not have served, but the careful detective had brought along authenticated documents and sworn proofs of all he had to state.

It required but a few weeks to settle all legal formalities, and Mrs. Ruthendale, after many

years of suffering and wrong, was once again put in possession of the property she had so long been deprived of through the wickedness and treachery of Bayard Knight.

We would have many pleasant after scenes to relate, but we leave them to the imaginations of our readers.

Our purpose has been chiefly to narrate the incidents in which the great detective was engaged.

We have but one secret to disclose, and it is with a smile that we record what, after all, is no secret to our old readers, who have gone with us so often through so many stirring scenes.

The King of the Detectives has a beautiful wife, and that beautiful wife was once Renie Ruthendale, and the detective first met his wife as a prisoner before the bar.

In after years, he has often told her that he kept her from going to jail, and she has as laughingly replied, only to bring her to worse imprisonment. She does not think so, however, judging from the pleasure that lights up her face at the return of her husband after some weeks' absence on a professional trip.

Burt Brandon is a born detective, and the job that yielded him a wife has not weaned him from his chosen trade.

THE END.

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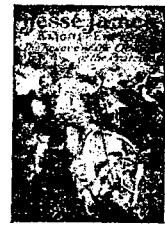
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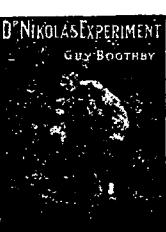
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